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THE MORETON MYSTERY

1

"What's wrong with your hand?" Jowett asked quickly.

THE
Moreton Mystery

By

ELIZABETH DEJEANS

Author of
The Tiger's Coat, Nobody's Child
Etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY
W. H. D. KOERNER

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The Moreton Mystery

I

A RED-HOT NIGHT

THE hazy gray of an August morning crept upon the city, slowly bleaching the tops of the sky-scrapers, gradually etching into distinctness towers and spires and roofs, rows upon rows of mammoth forms with excrescences revealed. Between them lay gulfs of murky gloom besprinkled with gleams that were and then were not, snatched away by oncoming day. Beyond the huge concourse of behemoths, a silvery strip widened and grew, paled at the edges, spread until it met encircling gloom, then stretched an eager arm oceanward, toward the vastness, the harbor awakening. Its twinkling lights were fading into dark bodies which rode the silvery expanse, formless hulks rapidly gaining outline. The city was waking from a restless sleep into the incisive complaints of day; the sun was rising upon a red-hot airless night.

Seated at his window, Parker watched the coming of a white-hot day. He had slept little; who had slept other than fitfully during that interminable night?

Certainly the girl in the next room had not! The evening before he had envied her, or, rather, he had envied the man who had joined her. He had seen her; the man he had not seen. Parker had passed her door just as she was entering it, preceded by a bell-boy bearing a single suit-case. She had turned to close her door, flinging back, as she turned, the long automobile veil she was wearing, and he had seen her face distinctly, an imperfect oval, a brow too wide and low to complete the oval of cheek and chin; dominant eyes the color of sea-water on a cold gray day and heavily fringed with black; straight determined brows; nose faintly piquant; a voluptuous mouth; dusky satin-soft skin. It was a contradictory face and arresting, ice-cold eyes, warm mouth, and pomegranate tinting. She was not tall, below the usual woman's height, slim and well-formed—and young, certainly not over twenty-two.

For a moment, before the door closed on her, her eyes had met his fully, and coldly, and Parker had experienced an instant interest. Was it possible that she was alone in this hotel overrun with officers, men of all descriptions and many nationalities, and, in addition to them, the civilians who were coming and going to Washington? Scarcely the place for a strikingly beautiful young girl.

As Parker had divested himself of garments and had bathed in water that no amount of persuasion could make less than milk-warm and then had prepared for

bed, he had continued to think of his neighbor—until his interest was given poignancy by the realization that a man had entered the next room. He had heard through the connecting door the rattle of the key against the metal of the outer door, the girl opening it evidently; then a soft laugh and some deep exclamation, the man's voice, smothered as if by an embrace. . . . So that was it—the expected man! A large man and deep-chested, for the voice was so deep.

Parker knew the hotel well. For the last five years it had been his custom to close his up-town apartment during August, give his housekeeper a month's holiday and betake himself to the seashore or the mountains; or, if possible, to add two or three weeks to his own holiday and go to Europe. When called into town by business, he always stopped here. It was a single room his neighbor occupied, not a suite, and it was ten o'clock. A girl who had come to meet her lieutenant husband? A bridal pair?

Early in the night, Parker had decided that they were certainly a married couple. A deep murmur, the man's muffled voice, reached him occasionally, and movements. They had been followed by what Parker had judged to be the silence of a complete understanding, and Parker had reflected that it was a pity that either a meeting or a parting should be staged in this abominable heat; it was enough to cause the first rift in the lute.

Parker was in no agreeable frame of mind himself.

Why in heaven's name must Mathew Moreton be moved to make a will during this blazing week in August! And why in such haste? He had received a long-distance call from Moreton's steel foundries in Pennsylvania: "Meet me at my office on Friday morning at eleven, Parker, and be prepared to draw up a will," Moreton had said. No, he had never felt in better health in his life, but he wanted the will drawn. "Then arrange to go out with me to Moreton House for over Sunday—we'll get out of the heat as soon as possible."

So Parker had come from the Adirondacks, inwardly fuming at the compulsion a multimillionaire can exert upon even a very successful lawyer. Had Parker himself possessed a million, he would have said, "Go to!" But he was not worth a million, far from it, though he hoped to be, some day. He was only forty, and he had been mighty successful. Moreton had had much to do with his success; he did not begrudge Moreton his will, but the man had a perfectly good will already—what had come over him?

Parker had drawn his bed into the middle of the room so as to catch what breeze there might be, then, sans garments of any sort, had stretched himself upon the bed. He had not expected to sleep. New York had turned on a spell of heat unknown since eighteen something, and all any mortal could hope for was to escape alive. There had been two days of this sort of thing, and to-day the horses had begun to drop, to say

nothing of humans—to-morrow there would be a harvest of death.

As Parker lay on the burning sheet, he hoped that Moreton had reached New York and was scorching, as he was. Possibly it was the killing weather that had set the millionaire considering whether his house was in order, altogether to his liking. There was not a nervous atom in Mathew Moreton's composition, but this sort of torment was enough to make any man think seriously of his possible demise.

Parker had passed on then to a consideration of his own finances: he had laid by, in gilt-edged securities, sufficient to provide for his old age, trust his caution for that, but he had some shaky investments which needed bolstering, everything was uncertain in these war-times—he could make good use of a hundred thousand, if he could lay his hands on it.

Everitt Parker wanted *money;* he had always wanted money; he had always longed to handle money —as Mathew Moreton handled money—as other millionaire clients of his handled money. His profession was his first passion, his was innately a legal mind, but money, sums of it at hand, would be a gorgeous pastime! . . . That was the reason he had never married; he had not met a fortune large enough to tempt him.

Then, as sometimes happened, the other man in Everitt Parker asserted himself, reminding him that, in his heart, he had no desire for the much married

or the widowed woman; that, had he ever been overwhelmingly in love with a young girl, he would have married; some one young and beautiful and with *brains;* some unusual girl. As he approached the forties, his craving for youth as a companion, an offset to legal intricacies and the perpetual contact with shrewd-minded men, had asserted itself, annoyingly. It was part with the lift of heart he had begun to feel when he watched the boys in khaki. There had been dozens of them at the station, moist-faced, their uniforms perspiration stained across the shoulders and around the belt line, swinging in and out of trains, swarming all over the place.

Parker had felt no particular heart-stir over the war; he had no young relations who would be affected by it; the thing was inevitable, and, in his secret mind, he considered the whole situation was being rather badly managed, but he would have to adapt himself to it. In a perfunctorily dutiful way he had joined with others of his profession in offering his services to the government. . . . But those boys forming into line and marching through the intolerable heat! They were going to march in the same fashion, only with even greater eagerness, straight into the German hell, while he, in taxied ease, was on his way to draw up a rich man's will! Dry work that, while the whole world was up and doing. Parker had envied them their youth and enthusiasm; had wished, for the time being, that he might be one of them.

And thinking of it again brought to his mind the warm youth of the girl in the next room—a war bride? Who was she, and from whence had she come? For over an hour there had been no sounds in the next room, a love-laden silence, Parker had decided. . . . But, after midnight, when the city had quieted somewhat, he was conscious of a murmur next door, voices quite indistinguishable but persistent. They were not sleeping, those two. They were talking steadily—from one o'clock until two.

Then there had been movements, the click of a switch, a line of light beneath the connecting door, the man's voice more plainly distinguishable. Parker thought then that he heard the rattle of a key in their outer door, and was certain that some one brushed by his own door. Then there was perfect silence. . . . They had gone then? Their light was still burning! . . . But in a few minutes it was switched off; the man had gone of course, the woman was still there.

Parker had thrust aside his pillow and had sought a cooler spot on the bed. This was a highly respectable hostelry, but it was not the first case of the kind he had known. Still, it might be quite all right, some young officer snatching the last possible minute with his bride and now bound for his train. . . . Sleep had seemed an impossibility to Parker, and reading meant a light and more heat. . . . Sprawled, with arms extended, he must finally have slept, but lightly and with the occurrence uppermost in his mind, for he

was conscious of starting up broad awake, galvanized by sounds in the next room. . . . He looked at his watch—it was the stillest hour of the night, three o'clock.

Then the sounds that had startled him were repeated, a woman weeping bitterly, deeply, desperately, now with face in her pillow, now turned, gasping for breath—so it seemed to Parker. And there was no man's voice answering her, either soothing or objecting; she was evidently quite alone and sobbing her heart away. . . . God, how she cried and choked and strove to smother her sobs! Parker had never heard any creature cry like that, keep it up, sob after sob, until every nerve in him was jumping. Mechanically he had begun to dress, with the intention of doing something, ask her through the connecting door what was the matter, telephone to the office—do something!

Then his usual caution had suggested that, if she were one sort of girl, he would simply be bringing confusion upon her; and, if of the other sort, he would probably bring an awkward entanglement upon himself. . . . As for telephoning to the office—that was out of the question.

With the reflection that there must be an end to all things, even to such weeping as hers, Parker had seated himself at the window and waited; the city was waking.

II

A SURPRISE

BUT not until the gray of morning lightened into unmistakable day was there quiet in the next room. Either the early stir in the hotel had frightened the weeping girl into silence, or exhaustion had plunged her into sleep; the latter most likely. Had Parker's strained attention discovered movements, he would have feared some desperate act. That any one could weep like that, for hours, in this suffocating heat, and not go mad, seemed impossible; it would tear a man to pieces, to weep like that. . . . Then Parker realized that he was in a subnormal state himself, exhausted and every nerve on edge. It had been a horror of a night.

Parker decided to bathe and dress and have his breakfast sent up to him, as soon as it could be served. At ten o'clock he must go to his office and prepare to meet Moreton, but until that time he would stay where he was, not because it was a whit cooler here than his office would be, but because he meant to make a few discoveries. If his neighbor moved about he would hear her; if she left her room he would follow her;

if the man joined her he would know it. He'd like to have a look at that man. The girl was evidently desperately wretched; the whole performance was queer, and if he spied on her it would be for her own good. Parker granted, however, that he was taking a personal interest in his neighbor; he had seen her face.

There was a stir in the next room before he expected it. He had completed his dressing and was waiting a reasonable hour for breakfast, when the telephone in the next room rang. As he had no compunctions now over listening at the intervening door, he heard distinctly:

"Yes—" huskily. Then more clearly, "Yes, it's I." Parker noted her enunciation and correct speech.

Then, "Oh, I'm all right!" A cheerful note! And after that bitter weeping! No man could so dissemble; the words would stick in his throat.

She was continuing. "Yes, but I'll get up. . . . At half past six—at the Thirty-third Street entrance? . . . Yes, I'll be ready. . . . I know, but don't worry, dear. . . . All right!" Again that cheerful lilt.

She replaced the receiver, and then Parker heard hasty preparations for departure. He guessed what "At the Thirty-third Street entrance" meant. Going that way she would avoid the lobby; the man would meet her there. It was six o'clock. Parker partly

opened his door and waited. The elevator that took her down should carry him.

Promptly at half past six a bell-boy appeared, and Parker gave them time to pass down the hall and near the Thirty-third Street elevator. Then he followed. As he approached them, he was conscious that, through the obscuring pink of the girl's veil, he was being closely scrutinized. But as they stood side by side in the elevator she became oblivious of his presence. Beneath her veil Parker could discern the black line of her lowered lashes, and that the warm color he had noticed the night before was gone. Her eyes were heavy and her skin looked dull. She appeared even younger than he had thought her.

When they reached the main floor, she stepped out promptly; the Thirty-third Street entrance was straight ahead.

"The office?" Parker asked of the elevator boy.

"Around to the left, sir."

Parker swung around the corner, then came back. She had reached the sidewalk and several details rushed upon Parker: a touring-car standing directly before the entrance, the bell-boy lifting her bag into the tonneau, a big man with an extraordinarily thick shock of gray hair bending forward and offering a guiding hand to the girl, seating her beside him on the front seat.

Parker knew that car almost as well as he knew his

own; he knew the man better than he knew any other client of his—Mathew Moreton, multimillionaire, husband of a woman nearly his own age and childless, the man whose will he was about to draw.

Parker turned back then, and, somewhat vaguely, went down to the grill. Had he been a vulgar sort, he would have laughed. Had he known Mathew Moreton less well, he would probably have shrugged. As it was, he was profoundly surprised—and interested.

III

THE WAIF AND THE WIFE

"IT'S NIXIE," Mathew Moreton said.

"The Nixola Allen mentioned in your will?" Parker asked quickly.

"Yes. . . . You won't see her at dinner—I want you to meet her now," and Moreton's big voice volleyed across the stretch of water, "Nixie! Ahoy, there! . . . This way!"

It was the afternoon of the following Saturday, and Moreton had brought Parker out with him to Moreton House. When they first glimpsed the lake, Moreton had pointed out a canoe which was mid-lake and headed for the dense, rock-studded woods opposite. Moreton had brought his car to a stop at the water's edge, where the park drive skirted the lake closely. Then he had called.

She heard, for she stopped paddling and looked behind her. Moreton waved his handkerchief, and she waved in return, then headed for them. There was a considerable distance between them, and Moreton settled back in his seat.

"What do you think of my lake?" he asked with

a note of satisfaction. "All that space covered with water was an old stone-quarry with a clean stream running through it, when I took hold of it. Only ten years ago, I bought Henderstott's folly, the house and the grounds. Then I obtained the quarry and the woods around it, and now see! I've got a hundred acres in all now, park and lake and terraces, and a sunken garden —a place that figures in every pamphlet on beautiful New York estates. When we get up to the house, you'll see the Hudson, up river and down, and pretty much all of Westchester County. There's nothing in New York State to compare with it, in my estimation. . . . Money and brains—the combination will accomplish anything!"

Parker had frequently heard Moreton express this same sentiment; one reason for Mathew Moreton's success had been his cheerful self-assurance. He had a cheerful-souled as well as a shrewdly confident way with him that won men—and money. In the main, Parker agreed with him: money and brains certainly procured the material things, and, to Parker's way of thinking, material things were desirable. But, judging by the will he had just drawn, money and brains had not procured matrimonial contentment for Mathew Moreton.

To some extent, Moreton's will had explained that curious night at the hotel. The thing was not like Moreton—as Parker had known him—but observation had taught Parker that when a man of Moreton's

type cuts loose from his wife he is apt to solace himself with youth. The millionaire's domestic relations were certainly not of the happiest, a thing Parker had not suspected until he drew the will. Parker himself had worked his way up; with him, in the beginning, it had been brains and an indomitable will; then brains, influence, and some money. He had a high appreciation of money, yet he did not agree with Moreton. And he doubted whether Moreton agreed with himself; it was simply his way of speaking.

But Parker nodded in agreement, while he watched the figure in the canoe gain distinctness, a slim little body topped by an obscuring mop of dark curls. "She is little more than a child," he remarked.

"It's not I can tell you exactly how old Nixie is—she can't tell you herself, nor can any one else, so far as I've been able to discover," Moreton answered. He hesitated, then said with decision: "You may as well have the story now. . . . Mrs. Moreton and I had been married eleven years and no children or prospects of any when we picked Nixie up. That was seven years ago—Mrs. Moreton was forty-one and I forty-five. It was just one of those chances, our private car was sided at a God-forsaken little town in Iowa, a wreck on the road ahead that held us eight hours, and in a field near by a circus, some penny side-shows and that sort of thing. We went to the show and saw that baby lifting weights and doing trapeze work, the prettiest, most graceful little body you ever saw, with

bleached curls fluffed up in a mass and eyes blackened till they looked like lumps of coal." His voice grew dry. "Mrs. Moreton was just recovering from her last 'interest' and was getting into shape for Child Welfare, and she fell for that baby. She got into a fever over the shame of it and—well, the upshot was that I regularly bargained for the child, and had no great difficulty doing it, for it developed that little Mademoiselle Nixola, as she figured on the bill-boards, didn't belong to any one in particular. A trapeze-woman by the name of Allen had joined the circus with Nixola attached to her, and a couple of years before the Allen woman had died and left Nixie as a sort of legacy to the troupe. As nearly as any one could determine, the child was about thirteen. I arranged with the manager, and Nixie came on east with us, and for a year or so there was a possibility that we'd adopt her. . . . But it didn't turn out that way."

Moreton was speaking more deliberately now, and there was something besides dryness in his voice, coldness commingled with feeling. "You see, Parker, Mrs. Moreton has always been high-strung, too much high-living and inbreeding on the part of her forebears, I suppose. . . . We started well enough, she had family and I had money, I was making money then by leaps and bounds, and the first years she worked to make us fashionable. Then that palled, perhaps because she couldn't make a mere dancing partner of

me, and there were periods of neuritis and neurosis and what-not, and then she took up 'interests.' . . . There were no children—I laid her discontent largely to that. . . . Well, in the beginning, I mildly opposed the adoption idea, partly because I hadn't much faith in Nixie's powers of regeneration—the kid was adaptable enough, on the surface; she was phenomenally observant and quick-witted, she slipped into beautiful clothes and smooth language—but I felt sure that, at heart, she was an Arab and always would be. That didn't bother me particularly, but it would bother Mrs. Moreton mightily in the future; Nixie and Mrs. Moreton were cut from entirely different pieces of cloth. But my main objection was that I wasn't at all sure Mrs. Moreton's enthusiasm would last—I'd watched too many 'interests' come and go. I advised waiting until Nixie was a little older—we'd know better then what she was going to be. If it proved a genuine bit of mother feeling, I was willing enough, my beginnings weren't much more to boast of than Nixie's." Moreton paused to laugh shortly. "Lord bless you! At the end of two years Nixie was a forgotten toy! She was given a governess and just shunted—kept out here in the country year in and year out. Mrs. Moreton was forty-four and her troubles, both bodily and mental, had begun, and they've continued to the present day. This last two years she's turned against Nixie—she can't endure the sight of her, and yet she won't allow the girl out of her sight,

poor Nix! . . . But Nixie's grown on me. She suits me. She's a loyal soul and she has a head full of good sense—and she's real *woman*. We're devoted to each other. I don't mind telling you that that little girl there is the biggest interest I have on earth; it's a thing you have to know, but it goes no further, understand. . . . Here she is—now take a look at her."

IV

THE STEEL GRIP

PARKER did not need Moreton's urging; he was looking with keen interest at the little figure which, as it swung from side to side, tossed a mass of dark curls over a face whose features he could not distinguish. Even when the canoe touched ground a few yards away and she sprang out, he did not really see her face.

Then she turned and flung back her curly mane, and, at that gesture, even before he saw her eyes, which were widened by a sudden flash of recognition, he knew who she was: his neighbor during that interminable, burning night; her slight body, undraped now by a flowing veil, and her childish curls had deceived him.

Parker experienced a decided shock. He was conscious that he was changing color. Just what his eyes had said to her he did not know, but he noticed that the warm flush in her cheeks had mounted to her brow, and that, after the first flash of recognition, she looked only at Moreton, and that her eyes had no part in her smile and general air of pleasure.

"You're back early!" she said. "I thought it

couldn't be you, for Holt said he was going to the station to meet you."

In his rapidly returning coolness Parker noticed there was genuine enough pleasure in Moreton's eyes and voice. "I decided to bring Parker out in the car. . . . Nixie, this is Everitt Parker, my lawyer, you know. Shake hands with him."

She sprang lightly to the step of the car, on Moreton's side, and leaned across his body, offering Parker her hand, and, as she did so, she looked fully at him, her lips still smiling but her eyes, opaque as cloudy green water, offering an unfathomable surface to Parker's steady observation. "The lake is pretty, isn't it?" she asked with the insouciance of a child. But her eyes were not a child's eyes; they were wise and very chill.

"It was prettier a few minutes ago, Miss Nixie."

Parker saw that she instantly grasped his meaning and also assimilated his quickly adopted attitude; she had negatived his recognition—so be it. Parker decided that she was swiftly intelligent and thoroughly experienced. When he had joined her at the elevator she must have realized that he had been her neighbor during the night, he had come from the room next her own, she could see that; and she must have guessed that he had purposely followed her. And Parker was uncomfortably conscious that now, before he had conquered surprise, he had looked at her meaningfully, with the intensest surprise and curiosity.

She drew her hand from his and dropped heavy lashes over her opaque gaze, and Moreton chuckled, as if amused at the cool scrutiny she had given his lawyer. "Getting a little exercise before dinner, were you, baby? It's a blessing this morning's storm broke the heat, but it's too hot still for much exertion—don't overdo." He looked fondly at her lowered lashes and flushed cheeks.

"It stormed fearfully here," she answered.

"Lilian got back safely from her motor trip?"

"Yesterday," she said composedly.

"Who are we going to run into at the house? The doctor, of course—if it wasn't for him, I don't know what we would do, he's an ever-present help in time of trouble." He spoke half amusedly, half seriously and also with a touch of contempt.

She nodded. "Coming back through the heat made Mrs. Moreton ill. The doctor's staying over till to-morrow."

"That's a blessing. . . . Lilian's all right again, I suppose?"

"Yes, it was just a nervous attack."

"Who else?"

"The Von Betlers and Mrs. Insmann. There is a Count Gansingen, too. They are all staying over Sunday."

"That crowd!" Moreton's broad black brows lowered into an angry line. "Who is this Count Gansingen?"

"I don't know, but Burke says he has lived in New York for a long time and that he knows all the best people. Burke said he was 'very much of a gentleman.' . . . He's not a German." Parker saw her hand touch Moreton's shoulder.

"Oh, some one of Lilian's fool foreigners," he said more quietly. "Who else?"

"Driscoll—he said he wanted to see you."

"Glad there's one American in the bunch—two, counting the doctor," Moreton muttered. "Driscoll's on a borrowing expedition, of course—still he's a Moreton. . . . He's been haunting you, I dare say, and you took to the lake—eh, Nixie?"

"He went for a walk," she answered non-committally.

"Yes, the house would be too hot for him. . . . The rest are all there?"

"They had tea, then they went for a ride." Her color had faded; she looked tired and grim, an expression that aged her.

"What that crowd needs is a good jolt!" Moreton said decidedly. Then his manner changed completely. He put his arm about her, took her hand and patted it. "You run along to your canoe now," he said affectionately. "I wanted Parker to meet you, that's all. He knows my affairs, so if ever you need advice and I'm not by to give it, you apply to him. You're the biggest interest I have on earth, Nixie girl—just remember that and live up to it."

The color swept over her face and her hand must have tightened on his, for Moreton laughed. "You have a grip, baby! . . . Show Parker the wonder. Parker give her your hand."

"Willingly," Parker said.

Nixie fixed her eyes on his and the suffusion which had softened them faded. "I'll hurt you," she said.

Parker laughed. He was slenderly built and not over medium height, but he was proud of his muscle. He trained regularly in his club gymnasium and was fully a match for the powerfully built man beside him. Parker had sporting proclivities—so had Moreton. On more than one occasion he and Moreton had wrestled and the millionaire had good-naturedly cursed what he called Parker's "steel-wires." Moreton had accused Parker of a sly knowledge of ju-jutsu.

The girl's hand was slim and firm, she gripped well, but Parker smiled as he looked from her steady eyes to her tightening fingers. Then he ceased to be amused, for each slim finger stiffened into steel. It was not just a hand-grip, arm and shoulder came into play—and she had the best of it.

Parker's color rose. "Lord—" he muttered.

She suddenly relaxed. "I said I would hurt you," she returned softly.

Involuntarily Parker rubbed his wrist. "Where did you learn that—in the—" He caught himself up; he had almost said, "circus."

"Born with her and then trained into perfection,"

Moreton interjected hastily. "We used to play about in my gymnasium, up there at the house, Nix and I. I have some muscle myself, but she always got the better of me. . . . Climb in behind, baby, and let me take you to the house."

She sprang to the ground. "No, I'm going to canoe."

"Come, get in—I'll send Holt for the canoe, later on."

"I better not," she said quietly.

Moreton eyed her for a moment, then nodded. "Perhaps you're right. . . . Go ahead—but, Nixie, be at the boat-landing at seven—I want to see you before dinner."

She did not answer, for a car had just rounded the group of willows about which the drive circled and was almost upon them. The broad-shouldered, strong-looking young fellow who was driving brought his car to an abrupt stop and touched his cap. He was in chauffeur's livery and Moreton spoke carelessly to him:

"Going for me, were you, Holt?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I didn't come by train. Draw out of the way, will you, and let us by. You can come on back then and look after this car—it didn't take the hill right."

"Yes, sir. But I'll have to go to the station first—Burke said there were some supplies coming out."

"Oh, all right—but don't forget to look after this car, for I want it in the morning."

The chauffeur backed and made room for them, waited for them to pass, but Parker noticed that he was not looking at them. His eyes were fixed on Nixie, who had already shoved her canoe into the water and sat with paddle across her knees.

And from beneath her curls she was returning the look, steadily.

V

A STOLEN INTERVIEW

MORETON parted from Parker in the upper hall. "Make yourself at home," he said cordially. "Burke, here, will attend to you. There's the library and the porches, or the grounds if you want to walk about. We'll gather at dinner-time, seven-thirty—I'll see you then."

The butler led Parker to one of the guest-rooms, where Parker dismissed him with: "Never mind my bag. I'll attend to it."

As soon as the door closed on the man Parker went to the window. His room was on the lake side of the house, above the terraces, with a clear view of the water and an extended one of rolling country beyond. Parker's gaze sought the farther shore of the lake; on his way to the house he had seen Nixie headed again for the opposite woods. But the canoe was not in sight now; she had probably drawn it up behind some rock and had gone into the woods.

Without pausing to look about him, Parker left his room and walked out on the terraces. The house, an enlarged and magnificent imitation of an old colonial mansion of the Delaware-Maryland type, a central

building and two wings with a Georgian portico its front entrance and a wide and long veranda in the rear overlooking terraces and lake, crowned a wooded hill above the Hudson. As Moreton had said, there were extended views in every direction. It was a superb location and nearly a million had been expended in beautifying it.

This was Parker's first visit to Moreton House, and he meant to inspect it very thoroughly, but that was not his immediate interest. He realized now that Moreton had not asked him to his country home merely to enjoy its beauty. Parker was inclined to be both critical and skeptical; he had met with too many surprises, too many unexpected twists in apparently honest and clean natures not to be skeptical. He surmised that Moreton wished to acquaint him with a situation about which Moreton could speak only half truths and about which he intended Parker should know only half the truth, and he had begun by introducing him to Nixola Allen, and by emphasizing a paternal attitude. Moreton seemed to feel that his will needed explanation or justification, particularly to his lawyer who was expected to enforce its provisions.

Parker had not drawn Moreton's two previous wills; he had been counsel for the millionaire only six years. It was a surprising document he had just been called on to prepare and had opened up to him a vista of conjectures, coming as it did after that occurrence at the hotel. And since Parker had made the astounding dis-

covery that Nixola Allen and the girl at the hotel were one and the same, the vista had immeasurably widened and lengthened. His brain was busied with conjectures and possibilities.

Six years before, when Moreton first engaged his services, he had said with characteristic decision, "I've watched your career, Parker—you've the right lawyer stuff in you, and you're not too well off to neglect business. You've a long way to go yet before your ambition's satisfied, and you're a young man, only thirty-four. Breen was a good lawyer, but he was too old, and now he's dropped off. I want a man who will well outlast me. Your wits are keen and your body's strong —you may set to upon my affairs."

Parker had made a careful study of the millionaire's business interests and had met most of the men with whom Moreton had financial connections, but of Moreton's family affairs he knew little more than the general public. He had met Mrs. Moreton only twice, and he had never heard of a Nixola Allen until he drew the will. Mrs. Moreton had impressed Parker as the young grande-dame, overcultured, physically delicate, and veneered by a deliberate vivacity; he had doubted whether she was clever. He had thought her beautiful, however, quite the patrician type, a woman who did not look her forty or so years. She had shown Parker a barely polite attention; she had never extended to him any social favor.

So Moreton's insistence that he come out with him

to Moreton House had surprised Parker. When the will had been signed and deposited, Moreton had said abruptly, "I told you when I telephoned, I wanted you to come out with me to Moreton House. When you took charge of my business interests, you made a study of them—you've taken hold of something else now, so I want you to meet my family."

Moreton certainly wished to acquaint him with a situation, not in its entirety, but sufficiently for him to get a good working basis, and Parker meant to gain all the knowledge possible. His opinion of Mathew Moreton and of his probable relations with Nixola Allen, the moral aspect of the situation, had nothing to do with his duty to Moreton as a client. Parker had already acquired an impression, down there by the lake, something of which he fancied Moreton had no suspicion, and he was intent now on verifying that impression.

When he reached the lake, he found, as he had expected, a path skirting it and leading into the woods toward which Nixie had been so determinedly headed. Parker did not enter the woods but kept at their edge until he saw the station, a stone's throw away, and noticed that there were no waiting automobiles about. Then he turned into the woods.

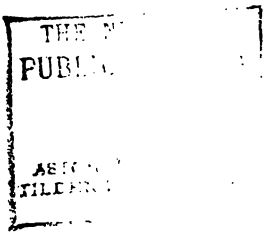
Moving cautiously through the undergrowth and circling the rocks with care, he took a diagonal course which would, in time, bring him to the lakeside. The morning storm had made the ground sodden, so there

was no rustling or snapping of twigs to hamper him. But his frequent pauses for observation and listening were not rewarded; he saw no one; he heard no one.

Then, suddenly, he came upon them. He had circled a rock and parted the bushes at its base, and there, a short distance away, stood Nixie and the chauffeur, whose powerful physique Parker had instantly noticed. He saw now that the young man was full six feet tall, broad-shouldered and broad-chested. He was not in the least handsome, he looked as if he might be a pugilist; low brow, high cheek-bones, long upper lip, preponderant jaw, and reddish hair cropped close. His eyes were his best feature, for they were vividly blue and keen—Parker had been struck by their intentness when he and Moreton had passed him on the park drive.

The young man had been looking at Nixie then and he was looking at her now; looking down at her, for she appeared a child beside his height and breadth. He was facing Parker, so Parker could see the play of his features distinctly. He was heavily tanned, but his very evident emotion had turned him a brick red. Had it not been for the expression of his large mouth, the slightly parted lips and his air of complete absorption, Parker would have judged him to be in a rage; he looked such a powerful brute. The spell of passion was on him, but not anger. Nixie's face Parker could not see, only her back-tossed curls. She

"Forgive me," he said chokingly.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was looking up at Holt and talking in too rapid and too low a tone for Parker to distinguish even a word. But when she finished, Parker caught Holt's exclamation: "You mean it?"

She nodded vigorously, and he suddenly caught her up and held her strained to him, his face hidden by her curls. His embrace was so tense with passion that Parker felt his own cheeks burn. The man was murmuring over her, smothering her with kisses.

She struggled resolutely, and finally he set her down —those steel muscles of hers were probably equal even to his strength. "Can't you be sensible?" she said. "Don't make me sorry I came!" She had stepped back from him, so Parker caught the words.

Holt's answer was perfectly distinct. "Sensible! after that promise of yours! Why, Nixie, it's been all I could do not to strangle Moreton. When I watch him petting you, things turn red. Be sensible!"

"Hush!" she said sharply. "That ridiculous jealousy of yours!" Her voice rang in anger and she had retreated until they stood well apart. "I owe everything to him!" she declared passionately. "I'd be making a poor return if I weren't at least affectionate to him! I won't endure being misunderstood!"

He flung back his head. "I hate him! I wish he was—" He stopped suddenly, lowered his head and looked down at the ground, his face flaming, his lips bitten.

Nixie said nothing at all, simply looked at him. Parker had a partial view of her face now, lips hard-set and eyes steady. Though a little thing, she looked imposing. She neither moved nor spoke until Holt raised his eyes to her. The flush of angry jealousy was fading from his face; when he met her steady gaze, it vanished and he looked ashamed and miserable.

"Harry—" she said softly.

He reached her at a stride, dropped on his knees, put his arms about her and hid his face against her. "Forgive me—" he said chokingly. "It's enough—just to be allowed to love you—"

A conquered lion. She stroked his hair, smiled down on him. "Perfectly conscious of her power," Parker thought.

Holt drew her hands down then and kissed them, turned them palms up and held them against his face. Parker barely caught his thick murmur. "You know you hold me between your little hands. . . . You're so little—and so dear. . . . He can be near you, and I can't—that's what hurts—"

"I know," she said softly. Then with more decision, "But you must go now. The train will be in before you get there and some one may suspect."

"Very well—" he said in the same thick way. He got up, bent and kissed her hair, turned hastily and disappeared behind a rock. Parker heard him start his machine.

Nixie stood for a few minutes where he had left

her, looked after him in an expressionless way, then down at the ground. Her lips quivered, then set in a resolute line. . . . Suddenly she swung about and dived into the bushes, almost within reach of Parker's arm; she was making for the lake.

And Parker also left the woods. . . . As he unpacked his bag, carefully locked it again, then dressed for dinner, he frowned frequently. When dressed he sat down by his window and stared at the terraces below, smoking steadily, thinking intently. . . . He wondered, among other things, whether Nixola Allen would tell Moreton that his lawyer had been their neighbor, that night at the hotel? What was Nixola Allen, anyway?

VI

THE HOUSE-PARTY

PARKER found the house-party gathered on the veranda and was conscious that every member of the group eyed him interestedly, though, when he joined them Mrs. Moreton rose with an air of merely vague recognition.

He introduced himself a trifle incisively. "I am Everitt Parker, Mrs. Moreton—I see you don't remember me."

She gave him a thin hand and as thin a smile. "Oh —yes, I do remember now—Mr. Moreton mentioned having brought you out with him. . . . Mrs. Insmann—Mr. Parker, my husband's lawyer; Mrs. von Betler—and Mr. von Betler, whom you have probably met, and Count Gansingen. . . . Edouard, you and Mr. Parker should know each other, the family physician and the family lawyer! Doctor Edouard Levene, Mr. Parker."

Parker received a distinct impression of each in turn, Mrs. Insmann, blue-eyed and fair-haired, a handsome woman, certainly over forty and indisputably a Teuton; Mrs. von Betler, perhaps forty-six,

dark and slender and nervously alert, as indisputably an American; Von Betler, six feet tall, strongly built and fair, decidedly of the Prussian officer type; Count Gansingen, not tall and not particularly well-featured, but with an indefinable grace about him, suggestions of the diplomat and courtier; and Doctor Levene, who shook Parker's hand cordially.

Parker studied the latter, for he remembered Moreton's remarks about "the doctor." Mrs. Moreton had strained a point when she had called him "the family physician." Moreton's physician was an elderly man whom Parker knew well. Doctor Levene was younger, though by no means a youth; Parker judged him to be near his own age, about forty. He was typically a New York product, Parker decided, probably an evolution from the heterogeny of the East Side: an Irish lift of cheek-bones, eyes and coloring suggestive of the Hebrew, the slight mustache and mouth of the southern European, mustache and hair both a jet black. He had the dapper body, nervous vivacity and affected speech of the erotic New York youth, yet, in spite of his effeminate effect, he conveyed an impression of cleverness and experience and the capacity to please. He evidently stood high in Mrs. Moreton's favor, for her affected pronunciation of his name and the drooping glance she gave him when she sank back in her chair were expressive.

Parker was struck by the change in Mrs. Moreton; he had not seen her for three years. Moreton had told

him that she was forty-eight, and it was apparent that she had reached the stage when not even a skilled masseuse can hide the inevitable. She was still a handsome woman, her body had not lost its long graceful lines, and either her maid or nature had preserved the golden lights in her hair, but there was imminent wreckage about her mouth and chin, premonitions of deep nervous lines, and there was a strained, dilated look in her large hazel eyes. And she was thinner; she had the pinched appearance about the nostrils usual with a highly nervous woman when mentally and physically subnormal. Her tinting had always been delicate and now she was only slightly rouged, yet even that touch of artificiality made her look hectic. Parker noticed that her hands moved incessantly, and that her vivacity appeared more than ever a veneer; she gave the impression of mental and physical tensity. She was a little pathetic, Parker thought.

He at once fell into conversation with Von Betler, for he knew something of his history and was acquainted with a number of his business associates. Though of German parentage, he was American born. His father had established the immense drug manufacturing company which had made a fortune for the family and had enabled the son to marry into Mrs. Moreton's set. But, unlike Moreton, Von Betler was well born; he came of a prominent Prussian family. Parker knew, after America had declared war, that Von Betler had proved himself stanchly loyal. He

had worked energetically for the Liberty Loans and had associated himself with that group of German-Americans which was interested in Americanizing the German in America. Though viewed with distrust in the beginning, Von Betler had won the liking of the patriots with whom he had worked.

Parker chose for a topic the equipping of a private laboratory, a matter in which one of his clients was interested, and Count Gansingen soon joined in the conversation; it appeared that he had studied medicine. He seemed a much-traveled man and extremely intelligent, and Parker recalled, now, that he had heard of him a number of times as a man of much social charm and possessed of a considerable fortune, not an American citizen, but a frequent visitor in New York, where he was much sought after socially. He was fair-haired and blue-eyed, and Parker decided that he must be a German, until Gansingen spoke of Switzerland as "my country."

"You are not German, then?" Parker said.

Gansingen smiled and shook his head. "Else I would not be here," he replied. "I am a Swiss—of that country whose neutrality irks me."

There was something very charming about the man; even his precise English was delightful. He had introduced the subject of war and he continued, "I can endure it no longer, this sitting still, with the whole world on fire to vindicate a principle. The first year of the war I was in the Orient. Then the fire touched

me and I returned to Switzerland. There I bore inaction as long as I could—I must have my part in this struggle. So I came to America; I am beyond the age for the trenches, but I have a good medical training, which just at this time, I am told, America is in need of, to send in support of its army. I have that to offer, and surely in some such capacity your government will find a place for me. I have been, as you say, 'pulling the ropes' to get some kind of commission with the medical corps. I am very eager for it."

Von Betler nodded. "You will get it. We want every man who is honest and willing, and trained material is at a premium. . . . I'm after the so-called German-American who has been systematically Teutonized, for I feel that the loyal German-American citizen is the man best fitted for the work of Americanizing the German-American. The German understands the German, however little he may understand the psychology of other nations. And the loyal German-American understands better than any other American citizen the pull of the 'Fatherland,' that commingling of sentimentality and patriotism which is so strong in the German and which has been so carefully fostered by the 'Father-Country.' And he knows better than any American possibly can the reasons why so many German-Americans have failed to declare their loyalty; they are afraid of their own people, afraid of boycott, social and political and in business, and they also resent the attitude of so many Amer-

icans, 'The leopard can't change his spots' attitude, and 'Every German be damned!' But the German-American is a big actuality in America, and a potentiality, and I consider his Americanization one of our most vital problems. . . . I've been giving myself to it." Von Betler expressed himself resolutely and with heightened color.

Gansingen spoke of the pro-German strongholds in the Middle West, he and Von Betler talked earnestly of the best methods of counteracting German propaganda, and Parker listened with interest, but with one ear also for the conversation of the others. Doctor Levene was entertaining the three women with an account of a Newport house-party of which he had been a member. Mrs. Moreton was of course his patient and his admirer, but Parker gathered that the other two women were not Doctor Levene's patients; Mrs. von Betler the doctor had evidently met before, but Mrs. Insmann he was meeting for the first time, and Parker concluded that the doctor was bent upon making an impression. He had much social gossip at his tongue's end; it appeared that his Newport hostess, Mrs. Gordon-Syke, was his patient, a star-patient evidently.

Parker was amused by the adroit way in which Doctor Levene played off his eminent hostesses against these three women who had not quite achieved the Newport altitude. He spoke in intimate and affectionate terms of the Grassmeres, whose wealth and

social stability there was no gainsaying. Mrs. Elfreda Craxton, the widowed niece of Alfred Grassmere, appeared to be the doctor's particular friend—he called her by her first name.

Mrs. von Betler asked, "When are you two people going to announce what everybody knows? Come, 'fess up, Doctor! A Christmas wedding? And am I invited?"

"My dear Mrs. von Betler!" Levene protested. "Neither Elfreda nor I are responsible for that ridiculous rumor! There's not a word of truth in it!"

But he looked both self-conscious and pleased, quite the boyishly devoted lover and the fortunate choice of an heiress. Then, with becoming promptitude he switched the conversation to Mrs. Gordon-Syke and gossiped with zest. Parker, who was a stickler for professional etiquette, was somewhat shocked when Doctor Levene concluded with a description of "dear Mrs. Gordon-Syke's ravishing peignoir, absolutely exquisite—but seductive—most charming things are seductive."

"The silly fool!" was Parker's first mental comment, which was followed by a somewhat closer analysis of the lady-doctor, or, rather, of the doctor of ladies, for Parker decided that the man deliberately appealed to the socially ambitious woman well along in life, whose nerves were askew and whose body was jaded; that he both tantalized and interested such women as Mrs. Moreton. He certainly had an instinct

for flattery, though with these three women his compliments were not at all subtle. But they did not want subtlety; they were too consciously on the wane; they demanded substantial lumps of sugar. "Well, why not?" Parker reflected, amused. "Their type needs a physician—quite as decidedly as their millionaire husbands need a lawyer, and, for the fortune-spoiled, the pill must be sugar-coated or they won't take it. Rightly handled, they are paying patients—and clients—the physician and the lawyer must live."

Parker also reminded himself that this type of woman was usually childless, and that even the over-civilized woman's heart is sometimes a queer void. Doctor Levene had a boyish air and lapsed easily into appeal, possibly a mere affectation, but the more alluring for that. To women who were themselves largely composed of affectations, if not actual abnormalities, Levene's was the only language that greatly appealed. The doctor was a very clever man; he was also a good self-advertiser.

Moreton interrupted Parker's observations. He came up the terraces and strode along the veranda toward his guests. Evidently he had been down at the boat-landing with Nixie, and it struck Parker that he looked grim; Parker wondered whether Nixie had told him that his lawyer had been a next-door neighbor of theirs at the hotel.

Moreton spoke to them all, but shook hands with none of them, not even with Count Gansingen. When

his wife performed the introduction, he said incisively, "Glad to meet you, Count. Mrs. Moreton takes a special interest in foreigners, so I'm always having the pleasure of meeting them. . . . My dear, I hope I haven't delayed your dinner?"

To one who did not know Mathew Moreton, the speech would appear merely an American brusquerie. How it struck Count Gansingen, Parker could not tell; the count bowed with faultless politeness. But to Mrs. Moreton the greeting was discomposing; her color rose, and Parker noticed that Doctor Levene glanced at her, then looked away.

"Burke has been watching for you—he'll announce dinner in a moment," Mrs. Moreton answered clearly. There was anger in her voice, and her foot tapped the floor impatiently.

"Where's Driscoll—he came out to-day, didn't he?" Moreton asked.

"Here!" a voice answered from a near-by window, and its owner swung himself out over the ledge. "I took up that book of Hoffman's in there, and gad! I've lost my appetite! Whose is it, Uncle Mathew—yours or Aunt Lilian's? . . . How'dy, Von Betler. How'dy, Parker. . . . *Hel*lo, Doctor—I didn't expect to see *you* here! . . . Mrs. von Betler, your butler turned me away from your door last week—"

He shook hands with them all, an immaculately groomed young man of about twenty-seven, a younger addition of Mathew Moreton, big-framed, ruddy-faced,

pale gray eyes, startlingly heavy and black brows, and a wide humorous mouth. A loose sagging mouth on occasion, as Parker well knew, for, at Moreton's bidding, he had several times taken this nephew of his in hand, straightened him out and paid his debts.

The story was, that Mathew Moreton had set his elder brother up in business, but the brother was of no account; that he had dropped off some twelve years before, and that Moreton had then tried to make something of his brother's son, had sent him to college and had given him a mining-engineer's training with the wish to keep him out of cities.

But Driscoll Moreton had thrown up his first job; he loved New York. And he had a natural aptitude for newspaper work. He had "pulled off" some brilliant things for various papers with which he had been connected. But he was given to lengthened sprees that were disastrous; while only his splendid constitution saved him from physical wreckage. Had it not been for his utter unreliability, he would have made a famous war correspondent; he had been eager to go to the front, he had persuaded one paper to back him, then had begun his duties by missing his steamer—at the eleventh hour he was too intoxicated to be shipped. Perhaps that experience had cooled his ardor, at any rate, he had not enlisted, and, so far, he had not been taken in the draft.

There was one curious thing about him, he was always immaculate in appearance; even when intoxi-

cated he avoided the gutter. And he had a social gift; he was deplored but greatly liked and was a favorite with women. "Gad!" he had said to Parker on the occasion of his last spree. "If only I could bring myself to it, there're plenty of women who would see me through, but no, thank you, *Papa!* I haven't got to the point of working women. . . . I guess Uncle Mathew don't miss the bits he gives me—he hasn't an heir, you know. And, Parker, if he'd let me have a sum just now, I know a corking investment that would net us an easy twenty-five per cent. Perhaps I'd pull up, if I'd make some money." Parker suspected that he had come now on that errand.

Mrs. von Betler made room for him beside her and he promptly remarked, "Stunning wave you've got on your hair—it's the 'Cocotte,' isn't it?"

"'The Cocotte?'"

"Yes, the 'Cocotte Wave.'"

"I never heard of it," she said with interest.

"You haven't! Haven't you heard of Madame Steinall's Cocotte Wave? Greatest thing invented! It's warranted harmless, will withstand fog, rain, soap and water—lasts till the hair sprouts again. It was invented by Madame Steinall—she's an Austrian, by the way, a Viennese—I'll give you her address," and he dived into a coat pocket.

"What's that?" Doctor Levene asked.

Driscoll raised his pale eyes for a momentary glance.

"Madame Steinall. . . . She's an adept in dyes, Levene—and she'll grow hair on the most hopeless bald spot in existence. Recommend her to your patients. Mrs. Ericson Cantor swears by her and Mrs. Gordon-Syke is one of her patrons—just tell your lady patients that—and that madame has a score of actresses on her lists. She's just acquired Mrs. Grassmere, by the way."

"Elfreda hasn't mentioned her."

"No? Your fiancée's too busy over the Red Cross for such trifles as hair-dressing, Levene."

"Mrs. Cantor's hair is a wonderful color," Mrs. von Betler murmured.

"My dear Madame! Such a suggestion never emanated from me!" Driscoll exclaimed in apparent horror. "Madame Steinall *dresses* Mrs. Cantor's hair."

There was a laugh in which Mrs. Moreton did not join. Her lip lifted; her husband's nephew was evidently no favorite of hers. Moreton, who stood towering above them, eyed the young man amusedly. Then his face changed and he looked away at the lake.

He touched Parker's shoulder. "See there!" he said, and pointed.

Nixie in her canoe was paddling across the lake, followed by half a dozen swans. In mid-lake she stopped and was surrounded; from the activity of the birds, she was evidently feeding them.

"Pretty, isn't it?" he said with growling softness.

"It's clean and cool down there," and he walked to the veranda rail. There was wistfulness in his eyes and in his voice.

Parker rose, that he might see better, and Driscoll also sprang up. "I say!" he breathed; and then, "I wish I could paint!"

"Burke is announcing dinner," Mrs. Moreton remarked dryly.

Moreton swung about. "I am quite ready, my dear," he returned curtly. "Will you and the count lead the way?"

The antagonism between the two was apparent enough, and Parker caught the exchange of several glances. Mrs. Moreton laid her hand on Gansingen's arm, and, with Doctor Levene on her other side, she "led the way," her head high, her beautiful profile rigid.

VII

A TOAST

MRS. MORETON showed discrimination in seating her guests; Parker found himself on Moreton's right, between Moreton and Von Betler. Mrs. Insmann came next, then Doctor Levene at Mrs. Moreton's left, Count Gansingen at her right, Mrs. von Betler between the count and Driscoll, who was at Moreton's left. Mrs. Moreton had placed a buffer on either side of her husband.

As the dinner proceeded, it had the qualities of a divided camp. Parker talked to Von Betler when the latter was not claimed by Mrs. Insmann, otherwise he was silent, for Driscoll was deep in talk with Moreton. Mrs. Moreton's end of the table was gaily loquacious; both the count and Levene calling forth laughter. Under their skilful homage Mrs. Moreton flushed into a vivacity which lost its metallic quality.

Parker, who was, perforce, a listener, discovered that the investment Driscoll was proposing to Moreton was nothing less than a controlling interest in Madame Steinall's establishment. Driscoll pronounced Madame Steinall a genius, but what interested Parker was the apparent business value of the proposition.

Driscoll showed some of his uncle's faculty for scenting a money-making certainty. Moreton was evidently impressed, for he gave the matter his close attention, his observant eyes all the while on his nephew's earnest face.

He leaned back—finally. "It's a good proposition," he remarked.

Evidently his approval meant much to Driscoll, for he flushed. "You'd be willing, then?" he asked eagerly.

"No," said Moreton.

The color left Driscoll's face with startling suddenness. "Why?" he asked finally.

"I'd rather not give my reason," Moreton returned. "Lack of confidence in me, I suppose."

"No—" Moreton said slowly and so low that Parker barely caught it. "I've always hoped you'd evolve some business capacity, for you'll have money to handle one of these days. . . . I drank when I was your age, and pulled up. A man who's determined and who has the business keenness you've just shown will find a way—I'm not the only man who has money to invest. Besides, you know how I feel—that you ought to be at the front—quit drinking and enlist. . . . You want Nixie—but I can't help you in *that* venture."

"You won't, you mean!" There was an angry glint in Driscoll's eyes. "I grasp your 'reason.' "

"Why I decline to back Madame Steinall?" Moreton squared his shoulders. "I'd fling all I've got into

the lake before I'd back a *German*—in anything! That's my reason, sir—in this case!"

"Oh—all right, sir. I'm sorry you have such determined prejudices. I have no love for the tribe myself, but, with me, it wouldn't stand in the way of a perfectly honest business transaction. Besides, Madame Steinall is not a German—she's an Austrian." He raised his glass and emptied it, then turned to Mrs. von Betler. He had flushed again and his hand was not steady. When on the veranda, Parker had suspected that Driscoll had been drinking during the afternoon. Burke refilled his glass, and Parker noticed that Driscoll quickly emptied it.

Moreton sat for a time, silent, his food untouched. Then he turned to Parker and talked of unimportant matters. The only thing that betrayed his thoughts was a remark he made about Nixie. "If Nix were here, we'd have a livelier end of the table. When we first took her, we settled on a birthday for her—by our count, she was nineteen last month. But Mrs. Moreton continues to regard her as under age for society, so Nix is excluded."

"I should say that she was two, perhaps three, years older than that," Parker answered.

"Very likely," Moreton said thoughtfully. "You see, she's such a little thing. That Allen woman wasn't her mother. Nixie must have been just a child the woman picked up somewhere. And I've no doubt that circus work stunted the child's growth. I've been

working on the matter of Nixie's parentage for some time and have made a memoranda of all the facts I've learned, and I'm going to put Jowett on the job. . . There is one thing sure, Nixie has sense enough for thirty-five—better judgment than some who are nearly fifty," and he glanced at his wife.

It was evident to Parker that Nixie had not told Moreton of his encounter with her at the hotel; Moreton showed no self-consciousness when he spoke of her. For some reason she had kept the thing to herself.

After glancing at his wife, Moreton deliberately appraised his wife's guests. There was a purposeful air about him, but his intention was not apparent until Mrs. Moreton rose. "Let us go out to the veranda for coffee," she said. "You gentlemen will not want to sit here, it is so hot."

"Quite right," Moreton answered. "But just wait a moment, Lilian. . . . Burke, fill our glasses—I have a toast to propose."

While the silence held a vague surprise at Moreton's manner, the butler and footman filled the glasses. When they stood aside, Moreton turned to them. "Fill for yourselves," he commanded. They hastened to obey, then stood at attention.

Moreton ran his eye over the company, then slowly rose, his glass held high. "Ladies and gentlemen—" he said incisively, "to the cause of the Allies—to *America!* . . . To the complete vanquishing of her

foe and the annihilation of autocracy, however long it takes—to *Democracy!*"

Every man at the table sprang to his feet. Levene stood with his eyes fixed on Mrs. Moreton. She was already standing, but when her husband concluded, she seated herself and looked at him with blazing eyes.

"I'm against this war—*I'll* not drink!" she said passionately. Mrs. Insmann also kept her seat. Mrs. von Betler had risen.

Moreton merely glanced at his wife. "Levene?" he said with peculiar emphasis.

The doctor had bent over Mrs. Moreton, imploringly; at Moreton's question he came upright. "Of course I drink to that!" he said warmly. "You know I'm going over as soon as I can get there!"

Moreton looked about him and smiled slightly. "I see the gentlemen are all standing," he remarked. "Count, you have something to say?"

Gansingen's fine voice rang out. "I come of a neutral country, but of whose neutrality I do not approve. I drink with all my heart!"

Moreton merely nodded; his eyes were shining and his face warmly flushed. "Von Betler—and Mrs. von Betler—you are both on your feet—do you drink my toast, in its *entirety?*"

Von Betler had grown fiery red. "I do! America is my country!" he said, looking at Moreton with hot eyes.

"Exactly!" Moreton returned.

tress, like people who had been undeservedly denounced. Driscoll and Parker were left alone.

Driscoll was staring at his companion. "Gad!" he exclaimed. "That gave me a regular turn! I've never in my life seen him like that! Why, he as good as accused them! He's insulted the lot of them! Aunt Lilian and Mrs. Insmann are fool pacifists, but the rest are as straight as a die! . . . They'll see to-morrow through, they'll want to avoid the appearance of a break, but they'll never come *here* again—not after that!" He poured himself a finger-length of whisky and drank it. "There's been another row this afternoon, I suppose. . . . He's simply brooded over Aunt Lilian's silly pacifism until he's off his head," he muttered.

Parker was perfectly cool again. "You will be off yours, if you drink much more," he said curtly "You're more than half seas over now. Better go to your room."

"I will—couldn't face that crowd now," Driscoll declared. He went into the hall and Parker saw him mount the stairs.

Parker stood for a moment, considering. The scene he had just witnessed and Driscoll's remarks had given him added food for thought. He wished to avoid the gathering on the veranda, and decided to go out by the front door.

VIII

SOMETHING HAS HAPPENED

THREE hours later, at half past eleven, Parker, who was in his room, was startled by a loud knocking on the door opposite his own, followed by exclamations and then a woman's high, tense voice: "No, it's Mr. Parker I want! . . . Mr. Parker! Mr. *Parker!*"

When Parker jerked open his door, it was Nixie who stood before him, her eyes wild and her face very pale. Parker noticed that there were others in the hall, Von Betler without coat or collar and Mrs. von Betler in negligee and, with them, Mrs. Insmann; all with startled faces.

"What is it? What has happened?" Parker demanded.

Nixie gripped his arm. "I want *you!*" she said. "Come down-stairs—it's Mr. Moreton—!"

"Something has happened to him?"

She was breathlessly urging him to the stairs. "Yes, yes—"

They were plunging down the stairs, the others following, when Nixie slipped and almost fell. Parker

caught her and steadied her. "Keep my arm! . . . Where is he? What's the matter with him?"

"I don't know—" she answered, panting. "He can't speak—he's in his study. . . . I think he's dying—"

"Dying!" Parker exclaimed.

They ran through the dimly lighted library and into the room beyond. Here they encountered a glare of light which made distinct the group at one end of the plain office-like room: Mrs. Moreton braced against the big square desk, leaning over and peering at what lay on the floor, her neck craned and her lips fallen apart; Count Gansingen standing beside her and looking down; Holt, the chauffeur, also in the same attitude; Burke, the butler, near by, his face ashen; Doctor Levene on his knees beside a prostrate body that hulked long and large; and, a little apart from the group, a stockily built, capable-looking man who stood with hands in his pockets, face grave and eyes observant.

When Parker and Nixie and those following rushed in, then stopped under the spell of tense silence that rested upon the room, the stranger glanced up. He nodded to Parker; then he tiptoed over to him.

Parker's dark face had blanched and set and hardened. "What has happened, Jowett?" he asked very low and through tight lips.

"He'll tell us in a minute," the other answered in a whisper.

"How came you to be here?"

"I'll tell you later."

Meanwhile the chauffeur had joined Nixie; his face was fiery red; his was perhaps the only face in the room that had not blanched. She looked up at him; her excitement had quieted and her straight brows were knit in tense questioning. "What is he doing to him?" she demanded in a whisper.

"Making an examination," he answered thickly. He continued to stand beside her while she stared at Doctor Levene's bent back and moving hands. They all waited. The servants were crowding in, and they also stood arrested. The man beside Parker was the only person in the room whose gaze was not fixed on the doctor and the prostrate body; his eyes roved over the room, passed from face to face. He studied Parker's hard-set expression as keenly as any other. Parker had folded his arms and was standing motionless, head a little bent, eyes intent beneath slightly lowered brows.

Doctor Levene lifted, finally, then rose to his feet. He was very white, save for the vivid spots of color on his cheek-bones. He ran his eye over the group, then, though evidently quivering with excitement, he spoke slowly and evenly and without a trace of his usual affected manner:

"I wish I could say something else—but—he is dead. . . . He died of hydrocyanic poisoning. Traces of the poison are in his mouth and on his lips. And, there, on the desk, is the bottle of hydrocyanic, uncorked—and the glass with some drops of the poison

in it. . . . Death must have come almost instantly —and I judge that he took the poison only a few minutes ago, certainly within the last twenty minutes."

When he concluded, there was a universal caught breath, like a great sigh. Then, in the silence that followed, a man's excited voice demanded, "What's happened? What's *happened?* . . . Oh, my *Lord!*"

It was Driscoll who had burst in upon the hush, in his pajamas, his hair disheveled, his look wild. At sight of his uncle's motionless body, his arms lifted in a dramatic gesture and he stood for a full moment petrified and staring. Then his arms dropped and he buried his face in his crooked elbow and wept like a child. Perhaps he was not sober, at any rate he was completely unmanned.

It may have been his audible weeping that brought on Mrs. Moreton's hysteria. She suddenly fell across the desk in a convulsion of shrieks and frantic laughter, clutching and slipping to the floor as Doctor Levene sprang to catch her. Count Gansingen, who was nearest, helped to lift her and hold her, for she struggled violently, shrieking over and over again, "He has killed himself! He has killed himself—" Von Betler came forward, and Mrs. Insmann, and they succeeded in holding her while Doctor Levene drew from his pocket a physician's case and gave her a hypodermic. Either her hysteria quickly merged into stupor or the opiate was powerful, for she soon relaxed into moaning, and then into silence. They carried her to the

couch and Mrs. Insmann sat beside her. She had not lost her presence of mind, but Mrs. von Betler was weeping and wringing her hands.

Parker had not moved. He had continued to stand with arms folded. He had looked at Doctor Levene while the latter was speaking; he had glanced at them as they worked over Mrs. Moreton, but most of the time he was looking at Nixie and the chauffeur. Holt stood close to the girl, and from the time she had entered the room he seemed unconscious of any other presence; he never moved his eyes from her white set face. Holt's own face had paled; he looked gray now, in spite of his tan.

Nixie had stood very erect. She had stared at the doctor while he made his examination, eyed him narrowly while he made his announcement, and she had turned and looked at the group collected about Mrs. Moreton; but she had made no movement toward them, had not offered her help. Instead, she went to Moreton, who had been forsaken for the moment, and knelt beside him. She looked at him for a long moment, then covered his poor distorted face with her little handkerchief. She did not weep and she said not a word; her face was as set and white as marble.

And she continued to kneel beside the body. She looked like a child as she knelt there, a little thing with curls escaping from the loosened ribbon at the back of her neck. But her face was not that of a child, nor her eyes a child's eyes, for they traveled

about the room, observantly; watched the group bearing Mrs. Moreton to the couch, then settled intently on the man whom Parker had called "Jowett." This man was now deftly examining the desk, the small unlabeled and uncorked bottle which was a quarter full of liquid, and the glass in which were a few drops, and the pitcher nearly filled with water. He examined closely the chair which was thrust back from the desk and also the floor near the desk and the rug upon which Moreton lay.

But when he bent and lifted the handkerchief from Moreton's face, Nixie caught his hand. "You're a stranger—what are you doing here?" she demanded.

"I have Mr. Parker's permission," he answered, and she instantly dropped his hand.

While they were busied over Mrs. Moreton, the man had said something to Parker, and, after a slight hesitation, Parker had nodded. Then the man had set to work. When Doctor Levene left Mrs. Moreton and turned toward them, Jowett was rising from his inspection of the body.

Doctor Levene's brows lifted in surprise. "Who are you?" he asked. "You don't belong in this house."

The man looked at him meaningly. "My name is Jowett—I was in Mr. Moreton's employ. I happened to be on the grounds when the alarm was given. I have Mr. Parker's permission."

The doctor's look cleared. "Oh, I see!" he said quickly. "I'm glad you're here, Mr. Jowett. Of course

Mr. Parker is in charge here, as Mrs. Moreton's representative. . . . Mr. Parker, will you suggest what we shall do next? The coroner must be notified —of course." He took out his handkerchief and wiped his brow and his hands, and it was evident that his self-control was breaking; for a nervous effeminate man he had borne himself exceedingly well. "This—this fearful thing has about bowled me over," he said thickly. "That was a quick passing—he must have been irresponsible for the moment. It's—I'm terribly sorry—" His voice failed him and he turned away.

"Who found my uncle?" Driscoll asked abruptly. "I was in bed when some one pounded on my door and said Uncle Mathew had killed himself." He had recovered from his fit of weeping; he was certainly quite sober now, deadly pale and red-eyed, but calm.

The doctor turned and spoke with greater steadiness. "It was Burke who told us; he said Miss Allen had sent him. I was on the veranda with Mrs. Moreton and Count Gansingen, sitting close to the library window, when we were startled by seeing the library door burst open and Miss Allen running through the library. The next moment Burke came out to us. When I ran in here, Holt and Miss Allen were trying to lift the body."

"*You* found him, Nixie!" Driscoll said with peculiar emphasis.

They were all looking at her, and she rose slowly and faced them, looked at them in a wide-eyed reso-

lute way, then fixed her eyes on Parker, and addressed him. "Yes, it was Har—Holt and I who found him." She had stumbled over the chauffeur's name and was momentarily confused. Then she went on steadily: "Holt wanted to see Mr. Moreton about something, and I brought him in. The door was a little open, but I didn't notice at first—only that the room was dim, just the reading light burning. I didn't see him the first time I looked in. . . . Afterward, I opened the door wider and we came into the room, and then we saw that Mr. Moreton was lying on the floor by the desk—as if he had fallen from his chair. . . . And we couldn't tell what was the matter till I turned on the lights. . . . When we saw his face . . . I thought it must be a fit—but he wouldn't speak—and —Holt said he wasn't breathing—and I ran out through the library—and Burke was in the dining-room—and I told him to get Doctor Levene. . . . Then I ran back and we, Holt and I, tried to lift him up—and Doctor Levene and the others came in and he made us put him down. . . . And then I ran for you, Mr. Parker." She had spoken with pauses toward the end, maintaining steadiness with the greatest difficulty. Her determined self-control was remarkable.

Almost at her first word Parker had lost his air of merely an observant onlooker. The moment she finished he spoke, and with decision: "As Doctor Levene has said, it devolves on Driscoll Moreton and myself to take charge here—until we can learn Mrs. More-

ton's wishes. . . . Miss Allen has told us what we all wanted to know. If Mr. Moreton's chauffeur had come on his errand a few minutes earlier, possibly this tragedy might have been averted. But it happened otherwise, and now we must endeavor to help in every way possible a family who are in deep distress. I beg you—and I know Driscoll Moreton seconds me in the request—I beg of you all to be calm. A man whom we all respected, and whom many of us loved, has left us. We are shocked and grief-stricken, but let us avoid excitement. Things in this room must remain just as they are until after the coroner's inquest, which is usual in such cases." Parker paused and looked about him, at the silent group and at the collection of servants. "Can any of you tell me where the nearest coroner lives?"

There was silence for a moment; then a voice at the door said, "I think, sir, there's a coroner at Fulton. Mr. Crane, I think 'is name is, sir." It was the butler, Burke, who had spoken.

"Fulton is at the far end of the county," Parker objected. "There are three coroners for the county. . . . Jowett, do you—?"

"There is a coroner at Ford's Landing, and he must be the nearest," Doctor Levene interrupted. "But I don't know his name."

"The telephone will help us to that," Parker answered. "Driscoll, you and Mr. Jowett and Holt and myself must remain and assist Doctor Levene, for

Mrs. Moreton must be carried to her room. I think Burke had better take two of the maids and go up at once and see that Mrs. Moreton's room is in readiness, then give Doctor Levene any assistance he requires. Miss Allen, will you see that matters are attended to up there?" He raised his voice slightly. "And the rest of you, please go quietly to your rooms. We want no confusion or excitement in the house—its master has gone to rest and its mistress is ill."

He was obeyed. But Von Betler, before he led his wife away, said to Parker, "I suppose we must remain until after the inquest. If there is any possible thing my wife and I can do, please let us be of assistance." He looked haggard and distressed, and spoke feelingly.

"Yes, no one must leave until after the inquest," Parker answered. "I'll call on you, Mr. von Betler—if I need help."

"It's a fearful thing," Von Betler said, his voice not altogether steady. He turned away abruptly and went out with his wife.

Count Gansingen came to Parker for a moment. He appeared more self-controlled than Von Betler, but he also looked pale and distressed. "It is mysterious and terrible—a man at the height of his success to take his life! Please if there is anything I can do, give me the opportunity of helping."

Parker thanked him, then turned to his duties. "Doctor, will you call the coroner? That's your province."

"No, you do it," Levene returned. "It will take time and I must look after Mrs. Moreton."

"Very well."

Driscoll and Holt and Jowett, with Doctor Levene in attendance, carried Mrs. Moreton up-stairs, and Parker was left alone in the study.

He surveyed the room alertly for a few moments, the windows, the floor, the door into the library. Then he went swiftly to the body, knelt beside it, removed Nixie's handkerchief and looked closely at Moreton's features; parted his thick hair and examined his head, then his throat and his wrists and his hands. He drew up the shirt-sleeves and examined the arms, as far up as he could, then drew the sleeves down again and replaced Nixie's handkerchief. He worked deftly and rapidly and did not disturb the position of the body. Then he examined the uncorked and labelless bottle on the desk, took up the cork, which lay near by, smelled it, paused a moment, then put the cork back in exactly the position it had occupied. He also scrutinized the paper which lay under the reading-light, a somewhat lengthy memorandum upon which Moreton had evidently been working.

Then, in the same swift, purposeful way, he went into the library and telephoned.

IX

SUSPICIONS AND A CONVICTION

PARKER was still at the telephone when Jowett and Holt returned; Driscoll was not with them. Holt stood near the hall door, as if waiting for orders, and Jowett walked about, glanced into the study, went to the windows giving on the veranda, looked out, and finally strolled into the hall.

When Parker had finished telephoning, Jowett turned toward the library. "When is the coroner coming?" he asked.

"In the morning—half past eight," Parker answered. "He has to get his jury together—then they'll motor over." He turned to the chauffeur. "Holt, will you kindly be on hand early in the morning—we shall want the car."

"Yes, sir," Holt answered and went out quickly, as if glad to escape. His heavy face still looked gray.

Then Parker asked Jowett, "Where is Driscoll?"

"He went to his room, Mr. Parker. He looks all in—I guess he's doing some thinking, like the rest of us." He spoke in an alert, somewhat tense way.

"Come into the study," Parker said.

He led the way in, then paused in surprise, for Nixie was there. She was covering Moreton's body with a robe taken from the couch. When Parker came in, she stood up, but said nothing, simply looked at him. Shock and strain were plainly visible upon her; she was tremulous.

Parker's quick eye had circled the study, but he did not ask her how she had entered. She had certainly not come by way of the library, and none of the study windows gave on the veranda, and the first floor of this wing of the house stood high; some ten feet from the ground.

Parker simply said, "Why, Miss Allen . . . I meant to do that. You ought not to be here—you have gone through too much already."

"I came to ask you something," she answered.

"Yes?" he returned kindly.

"What time will the coroner come to-morrow?"

"At half past eight."

She considered for a moment, then asked anxiously, "What will he do?"

"He will hold the usual inquest—ask us all what we know of the circumstances surrounding Mr. Moreton's death, then, if possible, determine the cause."

"I thought so—" she said slowly, and then, with a touch of appeal, "And will you stay in this room, or close by, to-night?"

"Yes, that was my intention. . . . But why do you ask?" Parker said gravely. Jowett, his hands

thrust deep in his trousers pockets, was eying the two keenly.

"Because this was his room," Nixie answered. "His papers are on the desk—and"—she looked away from him, trying to steady her quivering lips— "I know Mr. Moreton wanted you to look after his affairs—if he should die—even little things."

"I intend to look after them," Parker said. "So don't worry, Miss Nixie. . . . Won't you go to your room now and try to rest?" He spoke with great gentleness and he had come close to her.

Nixie gave him a swift upward glance charged with doubt and anxiety. "Yes—I'll go. . . . Thank you," she said, and drew away from him. Then, as if moved by impulse, she turned suddenly and offered her hand to Jowett. "Thank you for helping tonight," she said rapidly. "I've heard Mr. Moreton speak of you. You know how fine he was. He was a good father to me—always."

Jowett jerked his hand from his pocket and clasped hers. She let her hand lie in his long enough for him to look into her tear-dimmed eyes. Then she drew it away and hurried out through the library.

Jowett stared after her, his lips slightly parted, and for a few moments Parker watched his surprise and absorption. Then he asked, "Well, Jowett?"

The man started and turned. "A hell of a note—it looks to me! . . . Who is this Miss Allen?"

"A ward of Moreton's—she's lived with them since

she was a child," Parker said quietly. "But what brought you out here, Jowett?"

Jowett plunged his hands back into his pockets. Parker knew that attitude meant stirred feeling; once or twice before he had seen Jowett under the stress of emotion. "*He* sent for me," he answered. "Telephoned in at six o'clock—said he had a job for me that would take me out West, that might take weeks, and wanted to know if I was free to give all my time to it. He told me to get the nine o'clock out—that when the house quieted down, at half past eleven, he'd come out and have a talk with me, and that meantime I might amuse myself by keeping watch on the house and the grounds. . . . He laughed when he said that, like that part of it was a joke. . . . I caught the nine o'clock, got up here from the station at twenty to eleven and hung about. Then I ran into *this!*" He nodded toward Moreton's still form. There was decided feeling in his voice, distress and something akin to anger.

"Yes—" Parker said and drew a long breath. "Poor Moreton—"

"Have you any idea why he sent for me?" Jowett asked.

Parker remembered what Moreton had said about setting Jowett to work on Nixie's parentage. And the memorandum on the desk was evidently a list of instructions designed for him. Jowett was a detective who worked alone; Moreton had frequently

employed him, and so had Parker, for, like Moreton, he had a high opinion of Jowett's acumen and his discretion; he was clever and he was honest, he was not to be bought. It was exactly the sort of thing Moreton would put into Jowett's hands.

But, for reasons of his own, Parker did not impart his conclusion. He shook his head. "Moreton said nothing to me about sending for you." His manner was reserved to the extent of being provocative, perhaps intentionally so.

Jowett eyed him. "You guess, but you won't tell," he said shrewdly though not aggressively. "Well, I don't know why he sent for me, but I do know that you're appointed to look after Moreton's interests, and I've got something to tell you. I'll get it off my chest as briefly as possible, for I judge I've got a busy night before me: I told you I was hanging around out there for three-quarters of an hour? Well, I'd circled the house a couple of times when this Miss Allen came out by the front door and made for the garage. That husky chauffeur was there and the two talked in whispers for a time. I took them for a pair of lovers who were too serious for any spooning. Then the chauffeur went into the room that opens off the garage, his bedroom, I judge. He turned on the light, so I saw what he was doing—he took something white from a satchel and put it into his pocket. . . . Then they came to the house, and, because they came cautiously, *with* a lookout for any one that might be

"I saw them going up a *flight* of stairs at the end of the passage"

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about, I followed them. Miss Allen, in the account she gave, didn't mention how they got in here—she left us to infer that they came in by that door," and the detective pointed to the door into the library.

"But they didn't," he continued. "There is an entrance into the basement, below this room, which wouldn't be noticed from the outside because of the bushes. The veranda runs across the library, but not so far as this room, and the corner made by the veranda and the basement wall is filled with tall shrubbery that hides the door. . . . Well, Mrs. Moreton and the two men were on the veranda, just as the doctor said, and Miss Allen and the chauffeur took such pains to avoid being seen from above that I got interested. The door below opens into a passageway, and I followed them in. It was not lighted, but the chauffeur had a flashlight, and I saw them going up a flight of stairs at the end of the passage. They made as little noise as possible, and after they reached the top I couldn't hear a sound, though I came as far as the foot of the stairs. I stopped there, for I didn't know just what to do. The girl had come out the front way and I knew by the look of her that she was no servant. What she and the chauffeur were sneaking in that way for, I couldn't imagine, unless she was taking him to her room. Anyway, I thought best not to go up the stairs—besides, in fifteen minutes or so Moreton would be out looking for me.

"But I hung around the passage, against the time

Moreton would be out, when, all of a sudden, some rays of light struck across the top of the stairs and the next minute there was a commotion. I came up then and found myself in a long carpeted passage which had a boxed stairway at the end, evidently going to the floor above this, and an opening into this room, that window over there which is curtained like a window and looks like one, but is really a door—it's hinged like a door and swings into this room. It stood open and the light I'd seen came from it. When I came in, this room was glaring, all the lights on, and the people you saw when you ran in were collected about a body on the floor—Moreton, lying here by the desk. Nobody noticed me. I closed the door by which I'd come and stood where you saw me when you came in with Miss Allen. Just as I came into the room I saw Miss Allen run out through the library, going for you, I suppose." The detective had talked rapidly and toward the end, as he noted Parker's impassive face, with a certain sharpness and insistence.

When he finished, Parker nodded. "What you've told me confirms what Miss Allen said."

Jowett's brows lifted. "She didn't mention the window-door, and she said nothing about the interval of twenty-five minutes. I know just when they entered the house, for I looked at my watch before I followed them in—I didn't want to keep Moreton waiting. And I know to a minute when I entered this

room, for one of the first things I did was to look at my watch."

Parker frowned slightly. "It's natural enough, her not going into details, Jowett—she wouldn't want to call attention to a friendship with the chauffeur. And there's evidently no mystery about that window-door, for she came in that way only a few minutes ago. I think it was just as she said: Holt had some sort of a request to make of Moreton and she undertook to help him through with it. Miss Allen was devoted to Moreton and he to her; if she backed a request Holt had to make, Moreton would have granted it. He may have got into some speeding mess, for all we know."

"And that twenty-five minutes?" Jowett asked dryly.

"I dare say there's a perfectly good explanation for that interval—they may have gone up-stairs first, we can't tell." He sighed impatiently. "But all that's a secondary matter! What in heaven's name made Moreton do this mad thing!"

"Are you asking my opinion?" Jowett said with a flash of the eye. "I've never known a lawyer yet who found it easy to be candid!"

"If you have an opinion that's not founded on mere sensational conjecture, I'm willing enough to hear it!" Parker retorted icily.

Jowett was not quelled by his manner. "I have a conviction, Mr. Parker—a very decided conviction."

"About what?"

"Mathew Moreton's death."

"Have you? Explain what you mean."

Jowett's face had hardened into stubborn lines. "I will, Mr. Parker: I'm convinced that this was no suicide."

"You think it was an accident?"

Jowett's patience suddenly forsook him. "Accident! *No!*" he said with sudden heat. "It was *murder!* A cold-blooded, wilful ***murder***—and you're just as certain of it as I am!"

X

PARKER IS POLITIC

AFTER Jowett's declaration that Moreton had been murdered and that Parker was certain of it, there was a pronounced silence which lasted through several minutes, during which Parker looked steadily into the detective's angry eyes.

Then Parker said, "Sit down, Jowett, and let's talk this over. . . . You're wrong about my being certain this was murder. I did consider it until I ran over in my mind all the circumstances and applied to them a few facts which you don't know. Besides, I never let first ideas run away with me. . . . I am one of the executors of Moreton's estate, and am, of course, acting for his heirs. You have made a very serious statement and I should not be doing my duty if I didn't listen to all you have to say on the subject. I know you to be a sensible man and on the square—now tell me just what you think, just what you have discovered —mention names if you want to—our talk shall be strictly confidential. . . . Now go ahead." Parker's manner was grave enough, but not antagonistic.

"I am on the square," Jowett answered with a touch

of feeling. "I have just as strong a sense of justice as any other right-minded man. I knew Mathew Moreton—his kind don't suicide. He was a good sort, was Moreton, and if any one has done him bad, I'd like to send him—or her—to the chair for it. Besides, I'd like to pull off a big thing like this. . . . You know, Mr. Parker, in my business, I go a lot on instinct. The moment I came into this room I had the *feeling;* and when I saw Moreton's face I was certain. That man died *fighting.* Didn't you notice his expression? His face was set in a look of fury. . . . Now, you can see, from the position of the desk, against this end wall, that, when seated and looking over papers, his back would be turned to that window-door. The way in which his chair was thrust back and the position of his body after he fell indicate that he was seated back to that window-door and, probably, with head bent forward over those papers on the desk—"

"And also with his back to the library door," Parker interrupted.

Jowett made an impatient gesture. "Yes, of course, he sat with his back to the whole room. . . . Now, it would not be a difficult matter for a man and a cool-headed woman—it would be possible for one man alone, provided he was strong and skilful—to pinion Moreton from behind, cover his mouth with a cloth, get a pressure on his throat with the cloth held in such a way as to protect the throat from finger-marks, and pour some drops of that dope into his mouth. It takes

an awful short time for that stuff to act. When it did, he would slip to the floor without any assistance of theirs. The few drops poured into the glass and the bottle placed on the table would be a still easier matter."

Jowett expected an incredulous comment. Instead, Parker asked quietly, "You think then that one man, alone, could have managed it?"

"It's possible," the detective said, "if the man was unusually strong and skilful and had a cool head. You remember the Powell case? A towel and a bottle of poison. But both Powell and his assassin bore marks of a struggle—Powell's assassin hadn't quite strength enough to cope with his victim. Of course a man attacking from behind has the advantage."

"I saw you examine the throat and wrists; did you find any suspicious marks?" Parker asked in the same quiet way.

"No—but I made only the briefest examination. . . . Mr. Parker, I'm not making any accusations, but this can so easily be murder. There ought to be an investigation—I think the circumstances justify it. I want to examine Moreton's body more thoroughly. I want to find where that bottle and its contents came from; I want to search this room; I want to explore that passage out there and find where that boxed stairway leads to; I want to investigate that husky chauffeur, hunt up his record, and I want to know where those two were during that twenty minutes when I

couldn't hear a sound; and, most of all, *I want to get at the motive any one would have for doing such a thing!*"

"You have a fixed idea and many 'wants,'" Parker said with a touch of sarcasm. "You have stated your conviction and your reasons for it, now let me have my say. You rely on your 'instinct,' and I rely equally on my judgment of character. I am certain that Miss Allen loved Mathew Moreton—she just told us that he had been a devoted father to her—and I don't believe Holt is a criminal sort. I feel sure that those two can satisfactorily account for that interval, which, to my mind, is the only thing that tells against them. And I know the following facts: Moreton was violently loyal, intensely pro-Ally and fighting American. His wife is a pacifist and one or two of her guests at dinner last night were of that persuasion. Moreton was queerly dramatic over it. He proposed a patriotic toast, spoke for some length with intense feeling, practically denounced his wife's guests, and then came off in here after giving the butler a peremptory order to bring him a glass and a pitcher of water. It was a queer scene and impressed everybody. Mrs. Moreton said blankly, 'But what has come over him—?' and Doctor Levene, her physician, answered, 'You knew that he was particularly excited and distressed to-day, and yet you refused to drink his toast.' And she answered in great agitation, 'Oh, I know, but I don't see why he went on like that—against everybody. He

must have lost his mind.' And Driscoll Moreton remarked to me later, 'There's been another row this afternoon, I suppose. He's simply brooded over Aunt Lilian's silly pacifism until he's off his head.' I don't go so far as to agree with Mrs. Moreton and Driscoll, but I think it a possible explanation. I have known too many financiers, Jowett, who, for apparently no adequate reason, have retired to their rooms and put an end to themselves. Moreton was a terribly hard worker, and this last week he's been hustling about in heat that's been enough to prostrate any man. His kind do break sometimes, very unexpectedly and curiously. . . . I am telling you all this because it's best to look on all sides of this case, and not run away with a fixed idea."

It was not like Everitt Parker to give information, but the scene at dinner would be public property in a few hours, and he had decided that the explanation he had given would be the one given by Mrs. Moreton and her guests: a sudden and inexplicable brain-storm. And he also had his own reasons for emphasizing the probability of suicide.

Jowett had listened with keen interest, but his air was as resolute as ever. "It's possible," he said without conviction, "but surely, if there is cause for doubt, any chance that Moreton met with foul play, his wife, and you, as executor, would not oppose an investigation? If there are suspicious circumstances, you would want them cleared up?"

Parker had been thinking steadily. He had considered and had decided upon his course. He had forgotten nothing; every circumstance, every unexpected development, all his secret knowledge, he had weighed and considered. And he had given tense thought to Jowett's determined attitude. Parker remembered his own first important case—all hell would not have stopped him or have swerved him. Jowett was an ambitious man. He was also a clever detective, and he was animated by a very real liking for Mathew Moreton. It would never do to antagonize Jowett; he was bound to ferret, let him ferret unmolested.

"You have a perfect right to your conviction," Parker answered gravely. "There will, of course, be the inquest, and any information you can bring to it will be important. If there is a possibility of foul play, of course the heirs will want to know it, and I'd want to know it. You have your suspicions and your conviction, and I feel that you ought to be given every opportunity to investigate, now, before the inquest. Mrs. Moreton's not in a condition to give you permission, but I think I'm quite within my rights in saying, 'Go ahead and make every discovery you can.' . . . But, Jowett, you know as well as I that an accusation, even the statement of a suspicion, is a mighty serious thing." He ended a trifle sternly.

"I know all that," Jowett said. His mental comment was, "Lawyer to the backbone, but dead afraid I'm right. The chauffeur's not the only man who's inter-

ested in that girl—and little wonder, if she looks at every man as she looked at me."

"Very well," Parker returned. "Now, what can I do to help you? You want the run of the house—you can take my room to-night, if you want to? I shall get my bag and camp out there in the library."

Jowett considered a moment. "Yes, I'll take your room—I want a chance to get about up-stairs. I'll be stirring about here in the study, too, part of the time."

"Come on up with me then—but first let me see whether we can lock this place."

Parker went to the window-door, found a key in the lock and turned it. He next examined the door into the library and found that it also had a key. "That's all right," he said. "You can have the keys and go in when you want to."

As they left the room, Jowett said, "There's one question I'd like to ask—is Miss Allen one of Moreton's heirs?"

Parker's answer was prompt. "I can't say as to that. I know he was attached to her—he has probably made some sort of provision for her."

"I should judge so," Jowett returned.

XI

JOWETT MAKES A DISCOVERY

PARKER and Jowett went up to Parker's room. Parker secured his bag, unlocked it and thrust into it a book that was lying on the bed, then locked it again.

"I'll leave you now," he said. "I want to see Driscoll a minute, then I'll go down."

Jowett had glanced about the room, then had watched Parker lock his bag. "I'd like to see him too," he remarked. "It was like a stage frame-up—the way he came in down there in the study."

"Very well—come with me then."

They found Driscoll seated by one of the windows in his room, slouched in a big chair, head hung, and with the same disordered look about him which he had worn when he had appeared in the study; he was still in his pajamas.

"How are you?" Parker asked. "I thought I'd see how you were, before I turned in."

"I'm right enough," Driscoll answered tonelessly. He straightened somewhat and the movement made him catch his breath.

"What's wrong with your hand?" Jowett asked quickly.

Driscoll's hand and wrist were wrapped in a towel. Driscoll looked down at it. "It's strained," he said. "I'll get Levene to look after it, by and by—I've got a wet towel around it."

"Let me see it," Jowett offered. "Perhaps I can do something for it." Parker understood the eagerness the detective could not altogether eliminate from his voice. He himself was galvanized by sudden interest.

Jowett dropped on his knees beside Driscoll and began to unwrap the towel; Parker stood over them. "Take care!" Driscoll said through his teeth. "It hurts!"

His hand and his wrist and his arm were badly swollen. And his hand was scratched. "How did you do that?" Jowett asked. "Your other hand's scratched too."

"I don't know—exactly," Driscoll answered without raising his eyes. "I was drunk after dinner—had had a good deal in the afternoon and then wine at dinner," —he glanced up at Parker—"then that whisky—it was that finished me. . . . I fell when I got to my room, I suppose—anyway, I didn't notice I was hurt until we lifted Aunt Lilian; then I saw my arm was no good."

One of Driscoll Moreton's characteristics was an almost reprehensible candor, but now, neither his manner nor his words were candid. He had a shamed

look, and there also hung about him the indifference of wretchedness.

There was a moment's silence, then Jowett said, "I don't see how you ever managed to get out of your clothes, with a wrist like that?" He spoke in the mild tone one employs when bent upon eliciting information from an unsuspecting child.

A little of the flippancy usual with Driscoll Moreton tinged his answer. "Oh, I'd dress and undress accurately enough, even when too drunk to remember whether I'd simply scrapped with somebody or been beaten up for trying to kiss a girl." Jowett did not know Driscoll, but Parker did; the speech was very like him, and it was also the truth.

"You've got a bad arm there," Jowett continued. "The doctor ought to tend to it right away."

"He'll be along," Driscoll said indifferently. "He's fussing over Aunt Lilian just now."

"I'm going to get him," Jowett persisted. "You oughtn't to let that go. It must hurt like the devil." Parker had no doubt that Jowett greatly desired to invade Mrs. Moreton's privacy; the man was insatiable.

"Get him if you want to! I don't care what you do!" Driscoll exclaimed with sudden impatience. "I'm not thinking about my *arm*—all I want is to be let alone!"

Jowett seized upon the permission and hastened out.

Driscoll's flash of irritation was also very characteristic, but the way in which he looked up at Parker,

as soon as Jowett had disappeared, and what he said were not like the Driscoll Moreton Parker knew. "I'm done!" he said. "I've drunk the last drop of that stuff I'm going to! Katie, the chambermaid, came in here a few minutes ago with some brandy and begged me to take it, and I wouldn't. Katie's a good sort—she brought me this wet towel. . . . I made my vow, down there in the study. I wish I'd listened to him when he was living. I've been thinking, sitting here alone, of what a beast I've been. No wonder a decent girl won't have anything to do with me!" His eyes filled with tears. "And the last thought I had of him was an ugly one—I wished I had some of his money. I went up-stairs thinking that—with that damned whisky burning me up! . . . I'll sit here and give it to myself till the man he wanted me to be gets so worked into my marrow that I'll walk straight—from this night on." He was unstrung, yet there was a substrata of profound feeling and resolution beneath his emotion.

Parker had his own thoughts, but all he said was, "Your uncle would be glad to hear you say that."

"Perhaps he does hear me," Driscoll returned.

Jowett came in then. "Doctor Levene says he can't leave Mrs. Moreton just now, but he'll come as soon as he can."

"Yes, he and his little black bag," Driscoll said contemptuously; then with weary indifference, "I'm much obliged." His sudden change of tone was prob-

ably meant to cover his emotion; he kept his face turned from Jowett.

"You had better go to bed," Parker said.

"No. I told you—I'm going to sit here till morning. It'll be the best thing I ever did for myself." His voice was husky again.

Parker motioned Jowett out and they went to the head of the stairs together, but Parker made no reference to what Jowett must consider an important discovery, not even when Jowett said, "I know a reporter who knows Driscoll Moreton—he told me whisky had a queer effect on him. He said, too, that Driscoll was always broke and wanting money—he told me a lot about Driscoll Moreton. . . . He spoke of him as 'Mathew Moreton's heir.' "

"Whisky intoxicates Driscoll—as it does most people," Parker returned equably. "But Driscoll's a good sort, nevertheless. . . . Here are the keys to the study, Jowett. I'm going to get a couple of hours' sleep on the library divan, sometime before morning—I propose to have a clear head for to-morrow's work. You'll prowl about for the remainder of the night, I suppose?"

"I'll not do much sleeping."

"Then will you wake me at daylight? I always sleep on a case, but there's one bad thing about me—I'm never able to wake myself at a given hour, as some people can."

"You can rely on me," Jowett said.

XII

NO REAL MEETING GROUND

THE sun was shining brightly when Jowett aroused Parker. He sat up and looked about him. "You let me oversleep!" he said sharply.

"I couldn't help myself," the detective answered unperturbed. "I've had my hands full, Mr. Parker."

Parker regarded him gravely, but his momentary annoyance had passed. "You've had an eventful night then? . . . Well, I slept soundly—after I got to sleep. I feel better."

Jowett showed the effects of a sleepless night; he looked unrefreshed, thoughtful and grim. "Yes, I've had plenty to occupy me. . . . I had to hurry down to the station just at daylight, and the trip took me longer than I expected."

"I told you to call on me if there was anything I could do to help you."

"There wasn't anything you could do, Mr. Parker. . . . I'd rather tell my story in sequence, if you don't mind: As soon as I'd parted from you, I overhauled the study and the passage beyond, and the stairs—you probably heard me at it. I found that

the boxed stairway goes up to a small landing which has only one door, an entrance directly into Moreton's bedroom—one can go up from the study into Moreton's room and through it to the main hall. There's also an up-stairs porch which crosses Moreton's bedroom and the room next to it, which is an unoccupied guest-room, and runs as far as Miss Allen's room. One of her windows opens on it, and there is a door opening from Moreton's bedroom on to the porch. I wanted to examine Moreton's body next, but I had given particular attention to that bottle of poison and its cork, so, when I saw through Miss Allen's window that she was not in her room, I took the opportunity to search it. I was looking for a particular thing and I found it. In her bathroom is a medicine cupboard, and on the top shelf there are a number of empty bottles, the larger ones labeled 'Glycerine' or 'Witch-Hazel,' and several little one-ounce bottles labeled 'Rose-Water,' all from the same New York drug-store. The top shelf is dusty, and I found there a small dust mark where one of those one-ounce bottles had recently stood, and into which that bottle of poison exactly fits. And I also found, in the waste-paper basket, a little ball of paper. I opened it out; it was a label like those on the one-ounce bottles in the cupboard, and marked, 'Rose-Water.' The cork to that one-ounce labelless bottle of poison has an easily distinguishable odor of roses."

Parker had bent over to put on his shoes. He

looked up. "That's interesting," he said. "Was the ball of paper wet or dry?"

"Dry on the outside, damp in the center."

"Did you find any trace of a bottle from which the one-ounce bottle might have been filled?"

"No, I didn't find anything else in her room that interested me particularly—but I hadn't much time to give to it. I felt pretty certain that Miss Allen had gone for a talk with the chauffeur, and she might step in on me any moment. . . . Then I went around by Moreton's room and through into the main hall. Mrs. Moreton's apartment is directly across the hall from her husband's; then there are several guest-rooms on her side of the hall. On Moreton's side of the hall are, first his room, next the unoccupied guest-room, then Miss Allen's room, then your room, then Driscoll's. Driscoll's door was open and I went in. The doctor was bandaging his arm. I wanted the doctor—I'd decided that we'd examine Moreton's body together.

" 'So you're getting fixed up at last?' I said.

"Driscoll looked sick, he didn't say anything, but the doctor said, 'I've been telling Driscoll that Mr. Moreton's body ought to be examined, more thoroughly than I was able to examine it in those few minutes. Have you examined it?'

" 'When we were in the study, not since,' I told him. 'I'd like to have a look over again.'

"Driscoll seems a blunt sort. 'Go ahead and do it,

have observed it," Parker said dryly. Then with a change of tone, "But affection might have brought her and have held her there."

Jowett considered Parker's answer, then he shrugged. "Well, anyway, we went back up and, after we'd talked for a time—the doctor appears to know a good deal about the Moreton family—he went to Mrs. Moreton's apartment and I went to your room. I stayed there for a while and all the time I was there I could hear Miss Allen in her room, walking the floor—when she wasn't listening at her door to what was going on, just as I was, for no one up there appeared to be sleeping. Von Betler and the count didn't go to bed—they talked together in the count's room for a time, but most of the time Von Betler was with his wife and Mrs. Insmann. Mrs. von Betler was ill and had to have attention, and it was plain Von Betler was worried over her—he seems to be very fond of her. Doctor Levene was in and out, doctoring everybody, as far as I could make out, but most of the time in Mrs. Moreton's room. He told me, when we were talking together, that he'd had 'a tragic time' with Mrs. Moreton—that she'd been 'dangerously near a total collapse,' but was better. He talks like a sissy, but he seems to have a kind heart—he was certainly doing his best for everybody up there, Driscoll included.

"Then, near morning, I came down-stairs and had a look around the first floor and the veranda. In the

dining-room, I ran into the little butler, Burke. From the look of him, he'd not touched his pillow that night —I believe he was on guard down there—he looked it. I tried to talk with him, but he shut up tight. He's a polite but resolute little Irishman, though he talks cockney English. He said, 'I'm sorry not to answer questions, sir, but I've 'ad no orders to answer questions. Perhaps in the morning, sir, Mr. Driscoll or Mr. Parker will tell me what's my duty—I'm quite ready to do my duty, sir, though there's very little I know about what's happened.'

"I let him be and went out to the garage. I wanted to have a look at the chauffeur. The place wasn't locked and the chauffeur's door was open. I got a surprise then, for at the first glance I saw that he'd flown."

"Holt gone!" Parker exclaimed. "You're sure of that?" His brows had lowered.

"Gone—bag and baggage. . . . It didn't take me long to digest the fact, and then I got the garage telephone and arranged to have him shadowed, if he should turn up in New York. I'd just finished that, when a man came up from the park—he proved to be the head-gardener. He said that about three-quarters of an hour before, Holt had called him out from his cottage by the park gate and had given him a letter addressed to you which the gardener was to deliver at the house. Holt told him he was on his way to the station, that he wanted to catch the next train, and that

the letter would explain. It seems that the head-gardener can run a car, and Holt told him he better take charge of the garage, for he wouldn't be back, and then he made off, a satchel in each hand. The head-gardener was in something of a stew, considering what had happened here, but I told him just to look after the garage, and I'd bring the letter to you. He thinks he knows of a man who can take Holt's place, so the household won't be without a chauffeur.

"Then we got out a machine and I made for the station, for I had my suspicions. I found that Holt had not taken a ticket there—that he'd not been there at all. Then I came back to the garage and did some more telephoning. That's what made me late, and here's Holt's letter."

Parker took the bulky envelope without comment. In it were a letter to Parker and an enclosed and sealed letter addressed, "For the Coroner."

Parker read Holt's letter to him, put the enclosed letter in his pocket, then handed the open letter to Jowett. "You may as well read it, Jowett."

The letter was in a bold, decided hand, and was correct in form and spelling:

"My dear Mr. Parker:

"As Mrs. Moreton is ill and ought not to be bothered by such matters, I address this to you.

"A month ago, I gave Mr. Moreton notice that I would leave at the end of my month. I secured another position and have to begin my duties at once.

My new position is some distance away and is a really important position, far more so than the one I have occupied. I have to be on hand to the hour of agreement or I lose it. I was going to tell Mr. Moreton last night that I should be leaving early in the morning.

"Each month Mr. Moreton gave me a sum in advance for garage supplies, etc. I have deducted my wages from the sum and my account for supplies is in the locker in the garage, and, I think, will be found correct.

"I am exceedingly sorry to leave at this time, when the Moreton family are in trouble. It is absolutely necessary for me to reach my new position on time, otherwise I would remain until I could tell the coroner what little I know of Mr. Moreton's death. When I parted from you last night, I hoped I might be able to stay until noon, but I find that if I do stay I shall not be able to make train connections. As I can not appear at the inquest, I am enclosing a statement.

"Please accept my regrets and my sincere distress over what has occurred.

"Respectfully,
"Harry Holt."

Jowett folded the note. "Um—" he said thoughtfully. "He writes like an intelligent, educated man. . . . But it was foolish of him to run. . . . I wonder how the coroner will find—with a material witness decamped after that fashion?"

Parker offered no opinion. He had given close attention to the detective's recital and had decided that Jowett had been unnecessarily minute as to detail and altogether silent as to his deductions. He had evi-

dently settled upon his course; there was going to be no real meeting ground for them.

Parker had finished his dressing, had put on his coat, and now he settled his collar with decision. His air was energetic. "What the coroner'll do remains to be seen," he said. "I'm going up to my room now and wash up a bit," and he lifted his locked satchel.

Jowett eyed him gravely. "Here are the keys you loaned me," he returned. "There are no traces of my search in there—everything's just as it was."

Parker pocketed the keys. "Very well," he said pleasantly. "I'll see you later then, Jowett."

XIII

THE BUTLER TAKES A HAND

ARELY had Parker reached his room when he was disturbed by a mild knock on his door.
t proved to be the butler bearing a tray. "It's your akfast, sir," Burke said. "Mrs. Moreton thought guests would prefer to breakfast in their rooms."
'Mrs. Moreton is better then, Burke?" Parker ed.
'Yes, sir—very weak, Doctor Levene says, sir, but nin' 'round from the shock and quite herself again."
'That's good."
'I'll set it for you on the table 'ere by the window, There's coffee and toast and eggs and fruit; uld you like anything else, sir?"
'No, no, nothing more—though I'll do justice to at you've brought. Strangely enough, I'm hungry."
'Yes, sir—it's something to be sitting down to akfast with a good conscience, sir. . . . Shall ut your things to rights, sir? The footman's serv- across the 'all—I'm looking after the family."
"Across the 'all," referred to the Von Betlers, the unt, and Mrs. Insmann. And Burke's remark anent good conscience," was curious.

Parker was standing before the mirror, and he studied Burke's reflection. He was not an imposing butler; he was not tall or stout, and he was elderly, rather a small man with a round and, under ordinary circumstances, a rosy face, haloed by beautiful white hair. Though slightly lame, he moved quite nimbly. And, in spite of his cockney lapses, he appeared Irish. If Irish, he was likely to be quick-tempered and impulsive.

"You're Irish, aren't you, Burke?" Parker asked.

"Indeed no, sir!" Burke returned with decision. "I'm *English*—except by my mother, sir—she was Irish."

Parker wanted to say that of course his mother had had some small part in the matter, but it was no time for pleasantry. Burke looked tired and greatly troubled; he had probably come for a purpose.

Parker turned to the table. "Well, we know where your sympathies are then, Burke. If you were a younger man, you'd be at the front."

"Indeed yes, sir! But for Mr. Moreton and this bad leg of mine, I'd be back in England this minute. Mr. Moreton wanted me by him, sir. He says, 'Burke, you stay by me as long as you can. It's not much you can do over there, and I'll see that your nieces' families have money regular so they'll be easy in their minds while their 'usbands and sons go to the front.' And that's what he did, sir—every man of them was free to march."

"You've been some time with Mr. Moreton, then?"

"Ten years, sir—come this autumn. 'Twas Mr. Moreton brought me over from England ten years ago. I was butler to Sir Donald Blair, sir, before that—for twelve years—till he died."

"And I've been connected with Mr. Moreton for six years—that was a terrible thing, last night, Burke."

"It *was,* sir! I've never in my life had a worse turn. It was the surprise of it, partly, sir."

"Then you didn't notice anything unusual about Mr. Moreton when you took him the water last night?"

"No, sir—not what you would call anything unnatural. He seemed moved, though, sir, and I was moved myself, after what 'ad 'appened at dinner, sir. When I set the tray on the desk, he looked up at me so—under his brows—it was a way he 'ad of looking sometimes—and he nodded his head. 'We're well over fifty, Burke,' he says, 'but some day we'll break out. We'll shoulder muskets and make for the front, eh, Burke?' and he laughed in his throat, like."

"And you, Burke—what did you say?" Parker asked gravely.

Burke straightened. "I stood so, sir—and saluted. And he laughed again, and I went out. . . . That's the last I seen of him livin'." Burke's voice faltered somewhat.

"Yes, you appear to be the last person who saw Mr. Moreton alive. . . . You should tell Miss Allen about it, Burke—I imagine it would be a great

comfort to her. She was very devoted to Mr. Moreton, wasn't she?"

"Yes, sir. . . . Shall I put this suit in the bag, sir?"

"Yes, please, Burke. . . . And Mrs. Moreton would be comforted by it, too."

"These under-things, sir—how about them?" Burke asked with even greater reserve.

But Parker persisted. "In the bag, too, Burke. . . . As for some of those at dinner last night, I wonder if they guessed that, whatever Mr. Moreton may have done subsequently, he was merely grimly playing with them at dinner."

That struck fire. "You've said it, sir! Are they thinkin' a man like Mr. Moreton would have his brain upset by the likes of *them!* Not by no means, sir! There was no steadier head ever put on a man's shoulders than Mr. Moreton's head on his body, sir! Me that's been with him ten years knows that! He 'ad his troubles, sir, and he was sharp-spoken sometimes —he made hot young fellows like Holt champ the bit and he made silly, conceited people feel small, and sometimes he flashed out speeches he didn't mean, but he was a good man, sir."

Parker was in haste, but he found Burke well worth while. "He 'ad his troubles," was significant; Parker scented a fund of information in Burke. He also decided that the little butler was clever, much too shrewd to be even "skilfully handled." For some

reason of his own, he had chosen to give Parker an account of his last sight of Moreton, and Parker was certain that he had purposely mentioned Holt.

So Parker ventured the question, "What sort was Holt, Burke? They tell me that his month was up yesterday and that he has gone—cut the inquest."

"Yes, sir—so they say. I don't know him, sir—he kept by himself always."

It seemed to Parker that he spoke coldly. "Where was his home—how came Mr. Moreton to hire him?" Parker asked.

"I don't know that, sir, but it would not be like Mr. Moreton to take a man without reference. Holt was a good chauffeur, sir."

"But hot-tempered?"

"He is young, sir—that's all I meant to say," Burke protested.

Parker had made short work of his breakfast, and now he rose. "Well, Burke, I hope you'll not forsake the family in their trouble."

"I 'ave no wish to do so, sir. . . . But it will be Mrs. Moreton will decide about the servants for Moreton House, I suppose, sir." There was a cautious question in the supposition.

"All that will work out later, Burke, but you may tell the servants from me that I hope they will go right on with their work, and that I am certain none of them will regret sticking to their places. I know that would have been Mr. Moreton's wish."

"Yes, sir. . . . And may I ask, sir—is it true there's a detective in the 'ouse? The servants have taken on about it—for instance, there is Katie, sir, one of the chambermaids, was on her knees all night, upset something terrible, and when they said there was a detective here as well as there going to be an inquest, she got into 'ysterics. They 'ave no sense, sir, them *Irish.*"

Parker remembered that Driscoll had mentioned the chambermaid; she had brought him the wet towel. He made a mental note of "Katie"; undoubtedly it was Burke's purpose that he should. "There is a detective here and he will be present at the inquest, but there is no reason why any one should feel nervous because of that. What is it troubles Katie, Burke?"

"She hasn't told me, sir, so I don't know," Burke answered with an instant return to caution.

Parker was half amused and half irritated. No wonder Jowett had decided to "let him be"; he was a perfect little oyster. Nevertheless, Parker surmised that Burke could have told him some interesting things; he knew a deal more than Jowett was likely to discover. One thing was certain, the man dreaded the inquest; there was something or other he wanted to hide.

Parker tried him on another point. "Have you taken Mr. Driscoll his breakfast yet, Burke?"

"Yes, sir. He rang for me to his room, to 'elp him on with his clothes—because of his arm."

"It seems to be a bad sprain—how did he hurt it?"

"He spoke of a fall, sir—after dinner last night."

"And is Miss Allen down yet, Burke?"

"She's 'ad her breakfast in the library, sir. . . . And that makes me think, Mrs. Moreton has been asking for the keys to the study, sir—Doctor Levene was down asking about them for Mrs. Moreton. He says Mrs. Moreton was worried for fear people would be going in before the coroner came. . . . Miss Allen took her coffee, sir, and then she went out-of-doors."

Parker gave him the keys. "The room is locked and the windows fastened. Give the keys to Mrs. Moreton and *nobody* else."

Burke gave him a fleeting glance. "I will, sir. . . . And your bag—if you will unlock it, sir, I'll put in these folded things."

"Just leave them on the bed, as they are, Burke. I can't tell just when I'll be leaving."

"Yes, sir. I 'ope you'll be staying till to-morrow though, sir—the 'ouse seems distracted, with no one to take hold. . . . Across the 'all, they've sent for Mr. von Betler's car, and the count has telephoned into town for his car, so they expect to be leaving just after the inquest."

"Is Doctor Levene also going?" Parker asked.

"I think not, sir—not with them."

"Mrs. Moreton, of course, is not well enough to be left."

"Probably not, sir."

Parker took up his hat. "Did you notice what direction Miss Allen took, Burke? I want to see her."

There was the briefest pause before Burke answered firmly, "No, sir."

As Parker went out he said to himself, "I'll wager that's another man she holds 'between her little hands.'" He also surmised that Burke had been as intent upon sounding him as he had been intent upon sounding Burke. Was there any one in that house who was not suspicious of his neighbor—suspicious and watchful?

XIV

GUESSING AT THOUGHTS

PARKER searched the grounds of Moreton House, but he could not find Nixie. The canoe and two row-boats were at the landing; she was evidently not on the lake, though it was a tempting morning for the water, a cooler day than any so far in August, an eastern breeze and a southern sky, a hazy portent of rain. The flowers on the terraces were poignantly fragrant, the grass damp with dew, and a Sunday peace lay upon the place, a gentle smile which disavowed any knowledge of anxiety, suspense, suspicion, or death.

But Parker was in haste. It was half past eight o'clock when his search was over, and he wanted a word with Nixie before the coroner appeared. It had occurred to him that possibly Nixie meant to absent herself from the inquest, a mad bit of folly of which a girl might be capable; he remembered how anxiously she had questioned him about the inquest.

Parker went back to the house and found Burke in the library, armed with a duster. "Has Miss Allen come in?" he inquired.

"I've not seen her since she went out, sir, but I'll find

if she's in her room, if you wish. . . . Will you wait here, sir?"

"Yes, yes," Parker said impatiently. He felt certain that Burke knew where Nixie was.

Burke returned promptly. "Miss Allen is not upstairs, sir."

"Have you any idea where she is?" Parker asked. "It's important, Burke—I want to see her."

But Burke remained firm. "I don't know, sir."

Parker was both irritated and anxious. "It will never do for her not to be at the inquest," he said warningly. If Burke knew where the girl had hidden herself, and Parker was certain he did, he might take the word to her.

"I think she must be about the place—she'd 'ardly stay away from the inquest, I think, sir," Burke said mildly.

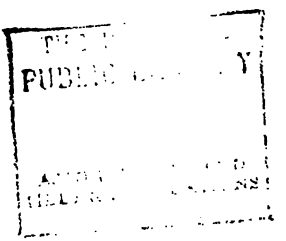
"Have you seen Mr. Jowett? Do you know where he is?" Parker asked. It was quite possible that Jowett had seen Nixie.

"I saw him go to the garage a bit ago, sir."

The garage doors were closed and locked, but Parker heard some one moving about inside. He rapped, and presently Jowett unlocked the doors and revealed himself, smudged and in his shirt-sleeves.

"Oh, it's you!" he said. "I thought it was the gardener with the new chauffeur. The gardener's on the track of a man to take Holt's place—he says they are so short-handed here, the draft took so many of their

"I asked her if she knew where the chauffeur had gone"



assistants. . . . The coroner hasn't come yet, has he?" He went over to a set-basin and began to wash his hands.

"Don't let me disturb you," Parker answered. "I'm looking for Miss Allen—have you seen her?"

"You're not disturbing me—it'll have to wait anyway—it's about time for the coroner. . . . Yes, Miss Allen was here when I first came in. She came out of the tool-room back there," and Jowett pointed to a door opening off the garage. "I've been overhauling things back there myself, for from the looks of her hands she'd been messing around the old tires and stuff that's stored there. . . . She was white as paper when I walked in on her, and then got red. When I asked her point-blank what she was about, she didn't answer, only looked at me. I tried to talk to her a little—among other things, I asked her if she knew where the chauffeur had gone, and she answered me curtly enough, 'I don't know,' and walked out with her head up." Jowett appeared thoroughly irritated.

"Did you see which way she went?" Parker asked.

"Straight to the house," Jowett answered, giving the roller-towel rough handling. "She went around by the veranda."

Parker himself felt ruffled, though he did not show it. He desired greatly to know just what course the detective would take at the inquest. Much depended on Jowett, and Parker thought he knew his man, but he was not certain. It was a thing he would not ask.

He looked at his watch. "Twenty-five minutes to nine—I'll go back to the house. The coroner ought to be along in a few minutes."

Jowett shoved some tools from a bench. "Why not wait here," he returned. "I'm going to—I confess I'm tired." He looked it, but at the same time there was an air of tensity about him.

Parker sat down, and, for a few minutes, the two nursed their knees in silence. Then Jowett said abruptly, "It always irritates me when I can't place a face. I'm living certain that I've seen Holt before! It grows on me that I have, but I can't grasp the connection. You know a deal about sporting events; Holt's the pugilist type—have you ever seen him in the ring?"

"No, I'd remember him, if I had. I never saw him until I came here yesterday."

"I've been trying to think if I hadn't seen him at some prize-fight. . . . He has anything but a good-looking phiz—he's noticeably ugly—but a *superb* body. . . . I feel he's given me the slip, in a way."

Parker felt, as he had felt with Burke, that Jowett was talking for a purpose. He answered equably, "He ought to be easily traced—he's too physically perfect a specimen to escape notice. . . . I agree with what you said this morning, that he's a fool to run."

Jowett's answer surprised Parker. "I fancy he's not run very far."

"In hiding, near by, you think?" The quite new

idea that Holt was in the neighborhood, possibly hidden somewhere by Nixie, gave sharpness to Parker's question.

Perhaps Jowett guessed Parker's thoughts; at any rate he spoke next of Nixie. "From that memorandum on Moreton's desk, he's evidently been trying to hunt up Miss Allen's parentage. That must have been the job he was going to put me on. . . . What's her history, Mr. Parker—how did Moreton come to take her into his family?"

This line of questioning was intensely disagreeable to Parker. If Jowett was intent on irritating him, he had selected the right subject. "I don't know much about the circumstances," he replied in the same equable way. "She's been with them since she was a child, I believe, and I understood Moreton to say that it was Mrs. Moreton who had wanted to take the child, in the first place."

"But I noticed that Miss Allen did not go to Mrs. Moreton when Mrs. Moreton had her fit of hysterics last night," Jowett returned shrewdly.

"I remember, she didn't. . . . The fact is, Jowett, I know almost as little as you do about the Moreton family. This is the first time I've ever been in their home—it's all about as new to me as it is to you."

Jowett's lips twitched slightly. Then he straightened and pointed: "There they come!"

He stood up and looked keenly at the two automobiles which had come up from the park and were cir-

cling the driveway. Then he asked abruptly, "What's the coroner's name?"

"Henry—William Henry."

Jowett whistled softly.

"Why—do you know him?" Parker asked.

"I didn't connect him with Ford's Landing," Jowett answered somewhat absently, his eyes fixed on the man who was driving the foremost automobile. Then he said with decision, "You bet I know—of him! . . . Come on, Mr. Parker—we'll see now, what we shall see!"

XV

THE HOUSEHOLD COLLECTS

WHILE the coroner and his jury were busied in the study, the household collected in the library. Jowett and Parker were among the first to appear; then the Von Betlers and the count came in, and the servants began to gather, hanging back in a group near the hall door. Driscoll Moreton came in alone, looking pale and harassed and carrying his arm in a sling, but as carefully dressed as usual. In a few moments Mrs. Moreton appeared, leaning on Mrs. Insmann's arm and with a maid in attendance bearing a black-edged handkerchief and a bottle of smelling-salts. Doctor Levene, who had received the coroner's party and had been talking with them in the study, came out to Mrs. Moreton and helped her to a chair. She was very white, looked weak and ill and walked uncertainly. Parker noticed, however, that she was becomingly gowned in filmy black and that her beautiful hair was elaborately dressed.

Nixie was the last to appear, and Parker drew a breath of relief when he saw her. She also looked ill, her skin was dull and there were heavy circles about her eyes. Certainly she had given no thought to her

appearance, for her curls were gathered in a hurried knot on the top of her head and thrust through by a big hairpin, and her dress, a loosely belted morning-gown of some summer material, was none too fresh; there were several smudges on the skirt, acquired probably in the garage. She stood apart, her full lips tight-set.

When she came in, Driscoll, who was standing beside Parker and Jowett, started toward her, but a veritable blaze lifted in Nixie's eyes. Driscoll dropped back, and Parker heard him sigh. Jowett also had noticed, and he eyed the young man keenly. Burke was the only person who approached Nixie; the coroner had ordered chairs to be brought into the study, and, as Burke passed her, carrying a chair, he stopped and spoke to her and she nodded. Of all the grave faces in the room, the little butler's was perhaps the saddest; his withered cheeks were pallid and his mouth drooped. He looked very old and troubled as he limped in and out of the study.

When the entire household had collected, Parker went into the study and gave the coroner Holt's letter, both Holt's letter to him and the enclosure. Parker explained briefly, and the coroner said with surprise, "He went and left this?"

He read Holt's letter to Parker, then the letter addressed to himself, while Parker studied him keenly. He was a medium-sized man, rather frail-looking and slightly stooped, with a sparse, closely cut beard and

weak spectacled eyes. His general appearance suggested the small-town shop-keeper of the more intelligent order. Parker had glanced the jury over; they were plainly dressed men, none too intelligent-looking, very evidently citizens of Ford's Landing.

The coroner folded the letter. "I must talk with the jury about this," he said gravely. "This man, Holt, certainly can not be reached to-day, nor for several days. He has given an address, but it is at a distance. He has made what seems like a complete statement, however. . . . Doctor Levene spoke of you, Mr. Parker—you were Mr. Moreton's lawyer—what would you do in my place?"

"I think it is a matter for you to decide, Mr. Henry. There certainly are those present who can identify Holt's signature, and Miss Allen was with Holt when the discovery was made, so there is one witness present who can give an account of it."

"Yes, so I understand. I shall proceed with the inquest. . . . I shall be glad of any suggestions you can offer, Mr. Parker."

"I have none to offer, Mr. Henry."

Parker went back into the library and took his former position beside Jowett. A few minutes later, at the coroner's request, they all filed in, the family taking the foremost row of chairs in the semicircle which was so disposed that every one in the room would face the coroner and Moreton's covered body. The coroner had placed a table before his own chair,

and had grouped the jury; he had given the large office-like room as nearly as possible the appearance of a court room.

Parker chose the end seat of the semicircle; by turning slightly, he could see every face in the room. And, perhaps with the same motive, Jowett took the seat next to Parker. Doctor Levene had guided Mrs. Moreton to the other end of the semicircle. He sat beside her and her maid sat just behind her. The servants came in last, and Parker noticed that Burke slipped into the chair behind Nixie.

When Mrs. Moreton entered the study she had glanced once about the room, had looked shrinkingly at her husband's covered body, and had seemed about to faint. Her maid hurriedly offered the smelling-salts, and Doctor Levene spoke in Mrs. Moreton's ear. He was evidently anxious about his patient and was doing his best to brace her for the ordeal. Mrs. Moreton nodded in answer and pressed her hand to her eyes. She sat in that position, motionless, except for the occasional shiver which shook her.

There was silence while the coroner arranged the papers on his table.

XVI

AN ACCUSATION

THE coroner looked up finally and by a few precise questions established the fact that the entire household and every employee about the place, with the exception of the chauffeur, were now present.

Then he lifted a paper. "I have here a communication from Harry Holt, the chauffeur—is there any one here who knows Harry Holt's writing?"

There was silence. Then a woman's steady voice answered, "I know it. I have often seen garage accounts he made out for Mr. Moreton." It was Nixie who had answered; she was sitting very erect, her hands clasped in her lap.

"What is your name—and your position in the family?" the coroner asked, as one would address a servant.

"My name is Nixola Allen. . . . I—Mr. Moreton always treated me like a member of the family. I have lived six years with Mr. and Mrs. Moreton—"

"Nixie was Uncle Mathew's ward," Driscoll interrupted sharply. "My uncle treated her as he would a daughter."

"I see. . . . Will you look at this signature, Miss Allen."

we saw Mr. Moreton lying on the floor by the desk—I've told you the rest." She ended abruptly.

"Why were you so eager to find Mr. Moreton?" the coroner asked.

"Because Holt had told Mr. Moreton that he was going at the end of his month and Mr. Moreton seemed to have forgotten about it. Holt was one of the best chauffeurs Mr. Moreton had ever had and I knew it would bother Mr. Moreton to be left without anybody. Mr. Moreton had been away from Moreton House for over a week and Holt was going in the morning. He wanted to see Mr. Moreton and explain."

"Did he need your help for that?"

"I don't know that he did," she retorted, "but I was quite willing to help him find Mr. Moreton. Holt had told me that he had to go and I was anxious for Mr. Moreton to know—Mr. Moreton had made no arrangements for a chauffeur, and in the morning he would be without one."

"I do not understand why you climbed through your window to reach the hall? I noticed when I went up-stairs that there is a door from Mr. Moreton's room into the hall."

Again Nixie paused and her already high color deepened. "I didn't want any one to see me coming out of his room," she said finally. "I never go into Mr. Moreton's room—in that way. I went in last night

only because I was so sure he was on the porch—and Holt was waiting and anxious to see him."

The coroner paused and stirred the papers on the table before he asked his next question. "Miss Allen, do you know whether of late Mr. Moreton had matters on his mind which caused him worry—any decided anxiety?"

Nixie's eyes dropped to Moreton's still body. Her lips quivered and the flush in her cheeks faded. She was silent so long that several people in the room stirred and sighed, made nervous by the tense silence. "He had—worries—" she answered at last and in a low voice, "but they would never—make him do *that*. . . . He was too splendid and strong to do that!" There was measureless pain in her husky voice, and a vibrant note, some intense feeling not easy to analyze. Judged by years and her appearance, she was a very young girl, but her emotion, whatever it was, belonged to a woman richly endowed with feeling.

The coroner's question, following as it did upon that note of profound emotion, sounded harsh. "Will you tell us of what nature were these 'worries' you mention?"

Nixie lifted her eyes to his. "No," she said with finality. "They were confidences."

"You know that you are under oath, Miss Allen."

The answer flashed from her lips. "I know that! There are others who can answer your question—if

they want to!" Her look and manner expressed detestation both of him and his questioning. From the beginning, there had been ill-concealed antagonism in her manner.

"I am here to discover every fact which may throw light upon this tragedy," the coroner said sternly, "however painful my duty may be to the person questioned." His thin cheeks had flushed.

"And there's no one more anxious to have you succeed than I!" Nixie returned passionately. "But I'll not betray confidences! I've told you Mr. Moreton did have worries, and I've also told you that I *know* they would never have made him do *that.*" And she pointed to the fatal bottle on the desk.

The coroner made a note. "We will take that up later," he said evenly. "Katie Kearney?"

He was answered by a gasp. "Yes—sir—" The chambermaid, a pretty gray-eyed, black-haired girl, blue about the lips from fright, grasped the back of Driscoll's chair and struggled to her feet.

"There's nothing to be terrified about, Katie," the coroner said reassuringly. "Just answer my questions truthfully—that's all we ask of you."

"Yes—sir—"

"Now, Katie—just tell us about yesterday—all you know about it—take your time."

Katie seemed unable to begin.

"Were you here when Mr. Moreton came home yesterday, Katie?"

"Yes—sir—"

"Did you see him?"

"Yes, sir." She was gaining confidence.

"How did he seem? His usual self?"

"No, sir—he was angry."

"Angry with you?"

"Oh, no, sir!" And Katie suddenly found her Irish tongue. "It wasn't me he was angry with, sir—it was a dollar he give me! I come through the hall up-stairs and he was comin' through walkin' fast afther he'd come from the automobile with the lawyer gentleman and Burke was takin' the gentleman to his room, and Mr. Moreton was frownin' an' he says to me, 'Is Mrs. Moreton back yet, Katie?' he says. And I says, 'No, sir.' And he said, 'When she gets back you come an' tell me—at *once!*' and he shut his bedroom door. It was mad he was, and I was scared—some one was goin' to catch it. But it wasn't me, for he'd give me a dollar, and I went down-stairs. It was the cook put me off—she was scoldin' about something—and thrue to God, sir, I forgot all about Mrs. Moreton's gettin' back till the hour aftherward! Then I run up to tell Mr. Moreton, but there he was comin' out of Mrs. Moreton's room—" Katie stopped.

"Yes?" said the coroner.

"He was speakin' loud, sir—and he says, 'It will drive me to suicide, Lilian! The thought of the future makes me *sick!*' and he went into his room and shut the door." She ended in a sort of breathless awe.

"Did you ever hear Mr. Moreton speak in that way before, Katie?"

"No, sir—never to say a thing like that."

"Did you see Mr. Moreton again yesterday?"

"No, sir—not till I seen him like he is—now. . . . All us girls, except Mrs. Moreton's maid and Mrs. von Betler's maid, was in our rooms talkin' together; we'd been up there all evening, and I come with the rest when we all run down into this room . . . and there Mr. Moreton lay—an' rememberin' what he'd said to Mrs. Moreton, I was 'most crazy, an' I run first thing up an' pounded on Mr. Driscoll's door to tell him—an' then I run back down here. . . . They whispered to me, 'He's dead,' they says, an' I couldn't do nothing but just pray. . . . Mr. Moreton, he was always—good—to us—girls—" She had flung her apron over her head and was sobbing aloud.

Hers were not the only wet eyes in the room. Driscoll's were full of tears. He turned about and put his hand on Katie's shoulder, "Don't cry, Katie," he said kindly. "Hush, now," and she quieted somewhat. Nixie had not stirred. She looked fixedly at Moreton's still form, her face hard as granite. Mrs. Moreton kept her eyes covered.

The cook, a belligerent-looking Irishwoman of snub features and ample girth, took Katie in charge and vigorously reproved her: "What kind of a noise to be makin' now, Katie—and him lyin' there! Shame to ye! . . . It's down sick ye'll be, shure!" Her own

cheeks were wet and she mopped them energetically, then applied the damp handkerchief to Katie's swollen eyes.

"Mrs. Horgan?" the coroner said.

The big woman stopped her ministrations and got to her feet. "That's me, sir!" she declared pugnaciously.

"Will you—"

"There's nothin' I know to tell yous!" she interrupted. "How should there be? I 'tend to my cooking and it's God's truth I've my hands full wid it! It's no time I have for gossipin' about th' family! I don't know a thing about it. I was in me room undressin' when them two, Mrs. Moreton's maid an' Mrs. von Betler's, run up cryin' to th' girls what had happened, an' I come on down and seen Mr. Moreton lyin' still, God rest his soul!"—she crossed herself—"and that's all I know, exceptin' that he was a good masther. He had a kind heart in him for them that works, had Mr. Moreton. . . . Once a month regular he'd come into th' kitchen an' slip me a ten-dollar bill. 'Get some cloridy of lime, Mrs. Horgan,' he'd say. It was just his joke—makin' fun of me pronunciation—poor soul—" Her voice had broken and then she caught herself up and settled into ferocity. "That's all th' testhermony I've got to give, an' yous are welcome to it!"

"That will do, Mrs. Horgan," and the coroner went impassively on. He questioned servant after servant.

They had noticed nothing unusual about Mr. Moreton, either on the day of his death or previously. They had seen no strangers about the place, everything about Moreton House had been just as usual, and they either could not or would not tell of any family dissensions. Mrs. Moreton's maid had been with Mrs. Moreton only a week, and testified that she and Mrs. von Betler's maid had spent the evening in Mrs. Moreton's apartment, waiting for their respective mistresses to retire, and that she, Mrs. Moreton's maid, had left the room only once, a little after ten o'clock, when, at an order transmitted through Burke, she had taken down to Mrs. Moreton, who was on the veranda, a wrap and her bottle of smelling-salts. That, when the alarm was given, she and Mrs. von Betler's maid had run up to tell the other servants.

The footman, who appeared to be a stupid sort and much frightened, testified that Mr. Moreton had "talked angry about the war at dinner." He also had been with the family for only a few days. The head-gardener, an intelligent man, said that Mr. Moreton usually got "very earnest" when he talked about the war. That Mr. Moreton was "wrapped up" in the war. The draft had taken all of the gardener's assistants, and that Mr. Moreton had given every man of them a handsome present when he left. He admitted that Mr. Moreton seemed to have something on his mind lately—that he often looked worried. Mr. Moreton was a good master, the head-gardener declared;

he "thought a deal of Mr. Moreton;" he had been head-gardener at Moreton House for five years.

He also testified as to Holt's departure and the letter Holt had entrusted to him. No, he had not known that Holt was going at the end of his month. Asked about Holt, he declared that the young fellow was a "fine" chauffeur, there couldn't be a better. "Holt was uppish," he never had anything to do with the other servants, and he was hot-tempered, "but he sure 'tended fine to his work and minded his own business." No, Holt had not seemed excited the night before, only in a hurry to get his train. Neither the head-gardener nor any of the other outdoor employees had seen any suspicious characters about the place. None of the servants had seen any one about who didn't belong to the place, except Mr. Jowett, and they had seen him for the first time when they came into the study the night before.

Then the coroner interrogated Burke. He elicited the fact that Burke was English and that he had served the family for ten years; also that Mr. Moreton reposed confidence in him, though Burke was modest in this admission. "I was never more than a trusted *servant,* sir," Burke protested. "Mr. Moreton was not the man to talk of his affairs with a *servant.*" Burke was evidently determined to establish that fact in advance.

"You served at dinner last night, Burke, did you not? Will you give us an account of what passed?"

"Yes, sir," and Burke gave a very accurate but entirely colorless account of what was said and done up to the time of Moreton's withdrawal into the study.

The coroner pressed him to describe Moreton's manner. "Was Mr. Moreton excited when he spoke?"

"No, sir, it 'adn't occurred to me that he was, sir."

"Angry, then?"

"No, sir, 'ardly that, sir."

"Just what impression did his manner make upon you? You surely received an impression of some sort, Burke?"

Burke's even delivery did not vary. "I thought his manner earnest, sir."

"But not excited?"

"Determined, rather, sir."

"You took the pitcher and glass to him, then, did you, Burke?"

"Yes, sir."

"Describe what passed."

"When I went in he was writing at his desk, sir. When I set the tray down, he looked up at me. 'We're well over fifty, Burke,' he says, 'but some day we'll break out. We'll shoulder muskets and make for the front, eh, Burke?' And I saluted, sir, and went out. That's the last time I saw Mr. Moreton livin', sir." There was the faintest variation in Burke's even voice, just at the end, otherwise he might have been describing the most ordinary of occurrences. His account lacked entirely the thrill he had imparted to it when

talking with Parker. If he was purposely endeavoring to appear stupid, he almost succeeded.

"I must ask you again to describe Mr. Moreton's manner?" the coroner said with a touch of asperity.

"He seemed earnest, sir."

"More so than usual?"

"No, sir—not unnaturally so, sir." It would be difficult to conceive of anything more unimaginative than Burke's manner, or more faultlessly polite.

"You have been many years with Mr. Moreton—have you noticed whether, of late, he was more irritable or excitable than was customary with him?"

"I can't say as to that, sir. I 'ad such respect for Mr. Moreton that whatever he did or said seemed quite as it should be, just Mr. Moreton, you see, sir."

"Do you know of his having worries or anxieties during the last few days, or the last few months?"

Burke's air was more positive. "Mr. Moreton never at any time mentioned such matters to me, sir, therefore I know nothing whatever about it."

The coroner nodded curtly, and the little white-haired man sat down. Jowett chuckled under his breath, and even Parker's lips twitched slightly; not an easy witness to handle, that! The jury whispered together, as they had when Nixie had flung her defiance at the coroner. But they asked no questions.

The coroner made a note, then called upon Von Betler. Von Betler stated that his father had been a German and his mother an American; that he was

American born and bred. He said that he had known the Moreton family for a number of years, for his wife had been a lifetime friend of Mrs. Moreton, but that he had seen very little of Mr. Moreton since Germany declared war, for until America entered the war he had remained strictly neutral and he and Mr. Moreton had differed on the advisability of America's participating in the struggle. Von Betler stated that America's entrance into the war had radically changed his attitude. It was a call upon his patriotism, and since the moment of America's actual entrance into the war he had both openly and privately stood for America and her interests. Von Betler also stated that from the moment Germany had declared war his wife had been strongly pro-Ally and an earnest worker in many war charities. "A patriotic wife and a stanch American is the best possession an American of mixed sympathies can have," Von Betler declared with no little feeling. "She sets his feet on the right path." Von Betler said that he had come to Moreton House with the hope of having an old-time heart-to-heart talk with Mr. Moreton, and that Mr. Moreton's attitude at dinner the night before had been a great surprise and shock to him.

Von Betler also stated that the butler had given an accurate account of what was said at dinner, but that he, Von Betler, differed with Burke regarding Mr. Moreton's manner; that he had thought Mr. Moreton entirely unlike himself, so much so that he had been

amazed. Von Betler declared, feelingly, that he had never been more horrified than he was when he entered the study a few hours later and saw what had occurred.

"Will you tell us, please, Mr. von Betler, just where you were and what you did after dinner, between that time and the moment when you entered the study?"

"I went from the dinner table out to the veranda with Mrs. Moreton, Mrs. Insmann, my wife, Count Gansingen and Doctor Levene. We had coffee there. Both my wife and I were distressed over the affair at dinner, so we excused ourselves and went to our room. Mrs. Insmann accompanied us. I remember I looked at my watch as we went up, and it was half past ten. My wife donned a negligee and I removed my coat and collar and we sat together in our room and talked. My wife and I were out of sympathy with Mrs. Insmann's pacifist ideas, so we talked earnestly and for some time. Then, suddenly, some one rapped loudly on our door. It was Miss Allen in great excitement calling for Mr. Parker; she had mistaken his room, which was across the way. She rapped then on Mr. Parker's door, he came out and we all ran down-stairs into the study."

"Did you leave your room at any time after coming up from the veranda?"

"No."

"Did either of the ladies leave it?"

"No."

The coroner called then upon Mrs. von Betler, who in a trembling voice verified her husband's testimony. She stated that in all the years she had known Mr. Moreton she had "never seen him in such a state." That she had always considered Mr. Moreton "an equable tempered man." That she had been frightened by his manner—he had seemed "so very angry and denunciatory, as if he had just heard or knew of something that had stirred him to the depths." She stated that she had accepted Mrs. Moreton's invitation to Moreton House because she wanted a chance to talk both to Mrs. Moreton and Mrs. Insmann about their pacifist ideas, for she felt that neither of them realized how foolish they were, "to say the least of it." Mrs. von Betler looked terribly distressed; she shook from head to foot while she talked, and when she mentioned Mr. Moreton's death her eyes filled with tears.

Mrs. Insmann was pale but collected, and was succinct in her corroboration of Mr. and Mrs. von Betler's testimony. She stated that for two years she had been an intimate friend of Mrs. Moreton; that she was the widow of Colonel Frederick Insmann, a United States army officer; that she had been born in Germany, but had come to America when a baby. She declared that her army experience had given her a horror of war, but, because of her army connections, she had felt it would be bad taste to exploit her opinions, and that she had never associated herself with pacifist activities. She said that she did not drink Mr.

Moreton's toast the evening before simply because she could not conscientiously "stand for war." She appeared to be a rigid sort of woman, and altogether certain of herself.

Count Gansingen testified that he had been born in Berne, that his parents had been Swiss, an old and well-known family, and that he was a Swiss citizen; that he possessed independent means and had spent much of his life in travel; that he had been educated both in Germany and in England. He said that for the last ten years he had spent most of his time in America because he liked America and the Americans and had made so many friends among them. He spoke of his country's neutrality and his earnest desire to "work with America in her struggle." He said that he had offered his services in any medical capacity the authorities might think fit, for, being a man of nearly middle age, it seemed the only opportunity open to him.

He stated that he had several times met Mrs. Moreton, socially, but had never met Mr. Moreton until this, his first visit to Moreton House. He said that the scene at dinner had made a deep impression on him; Mr. Moreton had been "so startlingly aroused and profoundly stirred." The count said that, as a stranger to Mr. Moreton, he perhaps could not judge so well as those who knew him well, but that when Mr. Moreton had first joined them on the veranda, before dinner, Mr. Moreton had appeared to him to be perturbed. The count's voice was not altogether

steady when he spoke of seeing Moreton in the st
"Ah, that was a dreadful thing!" he said. "I had s
a tremendous feeling of a life cut off, of a fine
capable man gone! It was the pity of it."

When asked to account for himself after dinner,
count stated that he had gone with the others to
veranda and had remained there until the butler
run out to call Doctor Levene.

"During that time, did you see any one enter or
through the library?"

"No, not until a girl ran through the library
Doctor Levene exclaimed, 'Why, that's Miss All
and the next moment the butler ran out to us."

"After Mr. and Mrs. von Betler retired, who w
with you on the veranda?"

"Mrs. Moreton and Doctor Levene."

"Did either of you leave the veranda?"

"No."

"Did any one join you, or did you see any one
or near the veranda?"

"Only the butler, who twice came out to us v
iced-water, and Mrs. Moreton's maid who brough
her mistress a scarf for which Mrs. Moreton had s
Otherwise we were alone and most of the time talk
earnestly, for Doctor Levene was arguing with M
Moreton against pacifism."

"Mr. Driscoll Moreton?"

"Here," Driscoll answered. He had started sligl
and his face twisted when he moved his arm.

"I see your arm is bandaged, Mr. Moreton."

"Yes, I sprained my wrist last night."

The coroner made a note, then he asked, "I may seem to be harping on one subject, but will you tell us what impression Mr. Moreton's words and manner made upon you—I mean at dinner last night?"

Driscoll, as was usual with him, was brutally candid. "I've got to explain first of all that I was a little stewed—I'm often more than that. I'd been drinking during the afternoon and I drank more at dinner. I wasn't drunk, but I was a little over, so you'll have to take my impressions for what they're worth. Uncle Mathew struck me as not excited, but tremendously sincere, and denunciatory. He was down on shilly-shallying and pacifism and spies." Driscoll's voice deepened. "The old gentleman was *grand* as he stood there and gave it to us! I felt like a dog—at not being in the trenches! And because he made me ashamed of myself, I criticized him. I said something to Parker about Uncle Mathew's being off his head and I was growling to myself that if one had a pile of money the war and everything else came easy, but I wasn't really thinking those things. What I really was thinking was that Uncle Mathew was absolutely right, that we've either got to strangle the German or he will strangle us, and that I'd let whisky make a slacker of me—"

He paused, and then his voice dropped into depression. "I took a big drink of whisky then, and the stuff

went to my head. I wasn't fit to be seen, and I wer off up to my room. . . . I've only the vaguest in pression of falling about and then getting into be and I didn't know any more until one of the maic screamed and pounded on my door, saying that 'M Moreton had killed himself.' I know I was in be then, for I got out and down-stairs. . . . I wasn sober yet, but it brought me around—seeing the fir old man—like that—" Driscoll's voice failed him.

"And your sprained wrist, Mr. Moreton?"

"I hurt it when I fell, I suppose," Driscoll answere thickly. "I didn't notice it until we carried Aunt Li ian up."

"Mr. Moreton, do you know whether your uncl had causes for worry, whether he was under an ur usual strain of any sort during these last weeks?"

"I didn't see Uncle Mathew often—ashamed t most of the time," Driscoll answered bluntly. "I don know of any unusual strain."

The coroner nodded. Then he called on Doctor Le vene.

The doctor testified that he had been Mrs. More ton's physician for the last two years and had been frequent visitor at the Moreton home, but that he ha never been Mr. Moreton's physician. Asked next abo the occurrences at dinner the evening before, he an swered that it seemed to be a matter which had bee very fully gone into already. On being pressed, h said:

"I can only state my impressions, Dr. Henry. I was startled and alarmed by Mr. Moreton's unusual manner. I should hardly call it excitement, more the sudden expression of a fixed idea—every one present seemed suddenly to be regarded as an enemy—such an unusual attitude for Mr. Moreton to take toward any one; ordinarily he was so genial."

"What do you mean by saying that you were 'alarmed?' Do you mean that, as a physician, you saw cause for alarm in Mr. Moreton's manner?"

Levene flushed. "A physician's impressions are not always correct," he said hastily. He looked highly uncomfortable, like one caught in a slip of the tongue.

"But such was your impression?" the coroner persisted.

The doctor hesitated, then said reluctantly, "I told you I was not Mr. Moreton's physician, so my impressions don't amount to much. . . . I was anxious, I suppose, because Mrs. Moreton had told me in great distress that Mr. Moreton had been excited and angry earlier in the afternoon, and she had told me of the remark Mr. Moreton had made, the same to which the maid, Katie, referred. I wanted to quiet Mrs. Moreton's anxiety, she was anything but well, so I told her that Mr. Moreton was merely suffering from the heat of the last few days. I wish now that I had said something or done something, though I don't know what I could have done, in my position." Levene's voice was both regretful and troubled.

The coroner made a note, and, with him, that appeared to indicate that he meant to return to some particular subject. "Will you give an account of the occurrences after dinner—such of them as you know?"

"Why, I went with the rest to the veranda and remained there until we were startled by seeing Miss Allen burst open the study door and rush out through the library, then run back again into the study. Then Burke came out to us and said that Miss Allen wanted me to come at once to Mr. Moreton. We ran into the study and found Miss Allen and the chauffeur trying to lift Mr. Moreton from the floor. . . . Do you want me to give the result of my examination?"

"Yes."

"Well, almost at the first glance I saw that it was a case of poisoning—all the signs were there. And I feared hydrocyanic even before I detected the odor and the traces of the poison in the mouth and on the lips. Then the bottle on the desk"—the doctor pointed—"told the story. He had fallen close beside the desk, evidently from his chair, which was thrust back. He was dead, quite dead, but there was no rigor whatever. As I stated last night, he could have been dead only a few minutes—I feel positive, for less than twenty minutes. . . . I looked for marks of violence, though such a possibility seemed out of the question, but found none. Of course my examination at that time was only a hasty one, for Mrs. Moreton was

otally overcome—she was in violent hysteria, screaming, 'He has killed himself! He has killed himself!' I did what I could for her and we got her to her room, but, for a time, I was afraid of a collapse, possibly brain-fever, or some serious result. To my relief, she rallied wonderfully, but, until she did, I had no time to think of other things. When she was out of danger, I felt that I ought to make a more thorough examination, and I consulted with Driscoll Moreton, who was quite willing. So, assisted by Mr. Jowett, I made a second and very careful examination which satisfied us both. There was not a mark, not a single indication of violence."

"Doctor Levene, you have been a frequent visitor in this household—have you noticed any change in Mr. Moreton of late, anything out of the normal, I mean?"

Again the doctor showed evident embarrassment. "I scarcely know how to answer," he said finally. "I was not Mr. Moreton's physician and my observations would be merely those of an onlooker."

"Such as they were, we should like to have them."

"Well—I have noticed for some time that Mr. Moreton was not his usual self. At times he was depressed and at other times he was highly irritable. . . . Remember, I am stating my *impressions*, and no knowledge derived from a confidence on Mr. Moreton's part."

"On Mrs. Moreton's part then, Doctor Levene?"

Levene made a quick gesture of distress. "Mr. Coroner, I simply can't answer that question! . . . Mrs. Moreton is here; if, after hearing her, you demand it, I suppose I shall have to speak—unless Mr. Parker can tell me that a physician is not legally bound to betray a patient's confidence?" He looked in flushed helplessness at Parker.

There was no occasion for Parker to answer, for the coroner said promptly, "That matter can wait, Doctor Levene. . . . Mrs. Moreton, I must ask you a few questions now."

She started and shrank. For the most part, she had sat sunk in her chair, her thin heavily ringed hand shading her eyes. Only occasionally had she dropped her hand and straightened, as when Driscoll had asserted Nixie's position in the family. She shrank and then she straightened, looking at the coroner with dilated eyes.

He continued. "Mrs. Moreton, we have had testimony regarding various occurrences, there has been much said for and against the theory that Mr. Moreton was in a frame of mind that might result in the tragedy, evidences of which are before us. . . . Will you please tell us whether, to your knowledge, Mr. Moreton was harassed, was under strain, was unusually worried, or was brooding over some matter or some subject?"

The room was very still for the moment before she spoke. "Yes, he was," she said clearly.

"Will you tell us what it was?"

Vivid spots of color showed in her cheeks. "It was the girl we took into our home seven years ago—Nixola Allen. She was the cause."

XVII

THE SEMICIRCLE PUTS OVER A FARCE

MRS. MORETON'S declaration was followed by a stir in the room, short drawn breaths on the part of the servants, a movement among the jury, a low exclamation from Driscoll Moreton; his pale face had flamed scarlet and he had half risen, then had dropped back again. Parker's eyes had traveled rapidly over every face in the room, and, for an instant, they had met Burke's; the little butler had flushed and his eyes were very bright. Even Jowett had stirred; like Parker, he was studying those about him. Nixie was the only person in the room who was apparently unmoved; she looked steadily at Moreton's body, her lips tight-set. But her hands betrayed her; Parker saw how they gripped and twisted in her lap.

The coroner had shuffled his papers, his face quite expressionless. Then he asked briefly, "Please explain?"

"I must go back a little to do so," Mrs. Moreton answered clearly. "We took Nixola into our home some seven years ago. We took her away from distressing conditions. She was a child trapeze performer and heavy-weight lifter in a small circus. We

had no actual knowledge of her parentage—as far as we could discover, she was an orphan. We both pitied her and I was more than willing to give her a home, but we never adopted her. My husband became very fond of her, and during the last year and a half she seemed fairly to obsess him—particularly during these last few months. We had given her every advantage, the best of governesses, a luxurious home. I wanted her to have every advantage and was quite willing to join with my husband in any sensible plan for her future. But I simply could not agree to some of his plans for her. During this last year, he suggested one impractical thing after another—she was always uppermost in his thoughts—and whenever I objected to any of his plans he became greatly excited, so much so that I felt very anxious about him. It seemed to me that he was losing his mind over the girl. More than once he said to me that his life wasn't worth living —he seemed to care for Nixola more than he did for any one or anything on earth, and his state of mind communicated itself to almost everything I said or did. He disapproved of everything I did, disapproved of my friends, and particularly of my attitude toward this dreadful war. Out of respect for his feelings, I have very carefully kept out of all pacifist movements, I did not obtrude my own personal views, and I am dreadfully sorry that I did not drink the toast he proposed last night, for, after all, the thing I want and have always wanted is whatever is best for my coun-

try. It's simply that I have such a horror of war and have felt that there should be some other way of settling things.

"But perhaps I am all wrong and war is the only way to bring about peace. Last night, on the veranda, Doctor Levene and Count Gansingen argued with me until they convinced me that I haven't been thinking sensibly. I was sorry I didn't drink my husband's toast. I ought to have done so, and particularly when I knew that Mr. Moreton was in an irritated and excited frame of mind. . . . You see, just before Mr. Moreton went to Pennsylvania, to his steel mills, a little over a week ago, he said that he wanted to get an apartment in New York for Nixola, let her live in it and attend a business college—that he wanted her to be independent. I *could* not agree to it. It was I, in the beginning, who had wanted to take the girl and I felt responsible for her. She is barely nineteen and a—pretty girl. She couldn't live alone like that—it wouldn't be best for her good name to do it. Mr. Moreton was in a terrible state over my refusal, and there was a scene." Mrs. Moreton put her hands to her forehead as if it ached. "He talked as he did yesterday afternoon, like one obsessed. . . . Then, yesterday, on his return from Pennsylvania, as soon as I came in from riding with our guests, he came to my room and opened the subject again. He told me abruptly that he had taken an apartment for Nixola, had made arrangements for a business course for her,

and that in a few days she would leave Moreton House. That she was of age and should do as she pleased. I foresaw various complications," Mrs. Moreton said with a drop in her voice; "it seemed to me most unwise, utterly impossible, and I told him so. In the end, he left me with the remark Katie overheard." Mrs. Moreton restrained her tears with difficulty. "It—it has not been easy to—to talk of my domestic affairs in this way—but the truth had to be told—" Her voice failed her and she pressed her handkerchief to her eyes. Her maid offered the smelling-salts, but Mrs. Moreton pushed the bottle away—she was excited as well as distressed.

If a pronounced silence at an inquest may be called an awkward silence, the moments that followed should be so characterized; awkward moments weighted with meaning, for there was much that might be inferred from Mrs. Moreton's statements. There were stolen glances at Nixie, but most of those present were glancing down. The servants looked shocked and distressed, Burke was hotly flushed, and Driscoll Moreton appeared a fit subject for apoplexy; he had crimsoned almost to purple and was shaking.

The coroner seemed at last to have decided on his next question. "Can you tell me, Mrs. Moreton, whether your husband had any business worries at this time?"

"Yes, he was afraid of a strike at the steel mills—that was what took him away during that hot

weather." She spoke with a certain indifference, as if she had made her one great effort and nothing else mattered very much.

"Do you know of Mr. Moreton's having any enemies, or an enemy?"

"No."

"Did he ever receive threatening letters, or express himself as fearful of any one or anything?"

"No, never to my knowledge."

"Do you know whether Mr. Moreton was in the habit of carrying a pistol, or whether he kept a pistol or any defensive weapon near him, in his room or in his study?"

"No, I'm very sure he didn't—I never saw or heard of a pistol in our house."

"Do you know of your husband's having had a bottle of poison in his possession? A bottle of hydrocyanic acid, or any other poison?"

Mrs. Moreton looked at him with widened eyes. "No."

"Do you know whether there was any such bottle of poison anywhere in or about the house?"

"No, certainly not—I should have been terrified to have any such thing about. . . . We had just the usual medicines, some of them marked 'poison,' of course, like carbolic acid, just the usual things one has in a house, but no dreadful thing like that on the desk—" She shuddered.

"Where were the medicines of the household kept?"

"In the medicine-cupboard in Mr. Moreton's room —all except the medicines prescribed for me by my physician and which I took daily."

"Did Mr. Moreton ever keep sums of money in the house—carry sums of money on his person?"

"No, he was particular about that. Everything was paid by check, and I never knew him to carry much money with him."

"You went to the veranda after dinner—did you leave it at any time during the evening?"

"No."

"Not even to enter the house?"

"No. I don't think I even got up from my chair. We none of us left the veranda, for after Mr. and Mrs. von Betler and Mrs. Insmann went up-stairs, Doctor Levene and Count Gansingen began to talk to me about Mrs. Insmann's and my views—they didn't approve of our action at dinner—and I was so interested in what we were saying and so distressed, too, that I didn't notice time or anything, until Nixola ran through the library. That startled us all."

"That will do for the present, Mrs. Moreton," and the coroner turned to Nixie. "Miss Allen," he said dryly, "were the 'worries' to which you referred the same as those mentioned by Mrs. Moreton, or of some other nature?"

"It is true that Mr. Moreton worried about me," Nixie answered huskily.

During Mrs. Moreton's testimony Nixie had

blanched until she was so white that the blue circles about her eyes looked like bruises. When she answered the coroner, her lips appeared to be stiff. She had not once raised her eyes from Moreton's still form and Parker could not decide whether she was cold with anger or with fear, not until the coroner said, "Mr. Parker?" Then Nixie lifted her eyes to Parker and he saw that it was neither anger nor fear that looked at him out of their queer cloudy depths; it was pain—and appeal. Her lips appealed, and without any word; they were blue and a little parted.

Parker knew what it was she begged of him. He returned her look, and his answer to the coroner was a somewhat dry "Yes." In answer to further questions, he stated that he had been Mr. Moreton's lawyer for some six years and that he was well acquainted with his client's business transactions, that Mr. Moreton constantly consulted with him.

"Was there any business matter which of late caused Mr. Moreton anxiety—the strike mentioned by Mrs. Moreton, for example?"

"No, nothing which should cause Mr. Moreton any unusual anxiety. He talked with me regarding the impending strike, discussed it in businesslike fashion, and on his return from Pennsylvania he seemed to regard the difficulty as settled."

"So far as you know, were Mr. Moreton's financial affairs in good condition?"

"Yes—quite so."

"Did Mr. Moreton ever consult with you regarding his family, domestic affairs, matters of that sort?"

"Only in a business way."

"Anxiously, or as if troubled over family matters?"

"No. He discussed business arrangements for his family coolly and in business fashion—as he always discussed all business matters."

"Are you well acquainted with Mr. Moreton's household, Mr. Parker?"

"I have met Mrs. Moreton three times, twice, casually, three years ago, and yesterday. To Miss Allen I was introduced for the first time yesterday. This is my first visit to Moreton House."

"What were your impressions of the scene at the dinner table last night—more particularly regarding Mr. Moreton's manner, his frame of mind?"

"Mr. Driscoll Moreton has given my impressions in even better words than I can choose. I can only add that it did occur to me that Mr. Moreton might be somewhat grimly playing with the assembled company."

"As Mr. Moreton's legal adviser you would be apt to know—to your knowledge did Mr. Moreton have enemies, or an enemy, man or woman?"

"Not to my knowledge. Plenty of business competitors, but not enemies."

"And no entanglements that might make some woman his enemy?"

"Not to my knowledge. In my six years' acquaint-

ance with Mr. Moreton, he impressed me as a particularly clean and upright man."

"Will you kindly tell us where you were after dinner, between that time and the moment when the alarm was given?"

"I went from the dining-room out to the front lawn, found a bench and smoked several cigars. When I returned to the front hall, I looked at my watch—it was a quarter past ten. I passed through the hall, to the library door, noticed a book which was lying on the small table just within the library door, took it up to my room with me and became absorbed in it. I was still reading when I heard my name called and Miss Allen rapped on my door. I hurried down to the study with her, Mr. and Mrs. von Betler and Mrs. Insmann just behind us."

"Did you leave your room after entering it?"

"No, not until Miss Allen came for me."

"Mr. Parker, any observations you may have made concerning this tragedy, any circumstances that may have come to your attention which the examination so far has not revealed, anything you may have to disclose will be of particular value to us. Will you call our attention to any such points?"

Parker's voice was mild and scrupulously polite. "I have been greatly interested in the examination you have conducted. Mr. Coroner, your examination has been admirably conducted, so much so that I have no suggestions to make."

The coroner bowed. He searched among his papers, then announced, "I shall now read the chauffeur's statement, which is as follows:

" 'Mr. Coroner:

" 'It is absolutely necessary for me to reach my new position on time, otherwise I would remain until I could tell you what little I know of Mr. Moreton's death. As I can not do that, I make my statement in writing.

" 'The following is all the knowledge I possess of Mr. Moreton's sudden death: I wanted to see Mr. Moreton before I left and explain that I must go early in the morning. I had given notice the beginning of my month, but Mr. Moreton had evidently forgotten, for Miss Allen was certain that he had made no arrangements for a chauffeur, and she very kindly offered to go with me to Mr. Moreton.

" 'We went to Mr. Moreton's study by the basement entrance, the entrance usually used by the outdoor servants. When we reached the study we found the door ajar, and when we looked in there appeared to be no one in the study. The room was very dim, for only the desk-light was burning. Miss Allen thought Mr. Moreton must have gone up to his room, which is above the study, so she went up there to find him, leaving me waiting on the landing outside Mr. Moreton's bedroom door. She was gone for a few minutes, and when she returned she said Mr. Moreton was not in his room, so she had gone out to the up-stairs porch, but he was not there and she had searched about but could not find him. We consulted for a time, wondering where he could be, then we came down to take a

final look into the study, and this time we stepped into the room. Then we saw a dark heap lying near the desk. We turned on the lights and then we saw that it was Mr. Moreton, lying as if he had fallen out of his chair, and I discovered almost at once that he was not breathing. Miss Allen thought from his contorted face that it must be a fit, but I felt certain he was dead. She ran out then to get help, then ran back and we tried to lift him to the couch. Then Doctor Levene, Mrs. Moreton, and a gentleman whom I did not know, and Burke, the butler, all ran in together. Doctor Levene said to me, "Don't move him," and I stood aside while he made an examination. In the meantime Miss Allen had run out and had come back with Mr. Parker, and others of the household had collected. Then Doctor Levene told us that Mr. Moreton was dead and called our attention to the bottle of poison on the desk.

"'I know of no reason why Mr. Moreton should have taken his life—he was the last person I would think would do such a thing.

"'HARRY HOLT.

"'If desired, I can be reached by mail.

"'Box 273, Station F, Chicago, Ill.'"

The coroner folded the paper and looked over the room filled with people. "If any one present knows aught to the contrary—if this statement can be challenged—I wish he or she would speak."

There was silence. Then one of the jury spoke up: "I'd like to fix the length of time the chauffeur says he was there on the stairway. Miss Allen, how long were you away?"

"I don't know how long," Nixie answered. "It couldn't have been more than just a few minutes, just long enough for me to go through the rooms the way I told you and then come right back. When I came back to Holt we stood on the stairs up there and talked for a time. Holt has told exactly what happened in his statement." Nixie was still very white, but her manner was decided.

"How long did you and the chauffeur stand there talking?" the juror persisted.

"Longer than it took me to look for Mr. Moreton," Nixie returned firmly, "though I have no way of knowing how long it was. . . . If you want to know just how long it took me to look for Mr. Moreton, you can come with me and I'll do over again just what I did."

Parker caught the glint in Jowett's eyes, and he himself was stirred by admiration. Nixola Allen was quick-witted. The juror looked somewhat vague, but the coroner remarked, "That is a matter we can take up later—kindly tell me, Miss Allen, did you have any conversation with the chauffeur after this tragedy occurred?"

"Yes, he helped the others carry Mrs. Moreton upstairs and I went along. Holt spoke to me, just a few words, before he and Mr. Jowett went down-stairs."

"What did he say to you?"

"I don't remember exactly his words, just that he

was so sorry for me, for—for he knew how much I cared for Mr. Moreton—" For the first time Nixie's voice quivered, then failed her.

"Did you see him again, before he left?"

"No." She had suddenly regained firmness.

"How, then, did you know that he had written this statement?"

Parker saw her hand clench as if she would like to strike her questioner, but she answered coolly, "I never stated to you or any one that Holt had written that statement and I did not know that he had made a statement until you yourself told us so. Except for the occasion of which I have told you, when we all went up with Mrs. Moreton, I have not seen Holt or talked with him since Mr. Moreton's death. I don't know where he went, or where he is, or what he is doing."

The coroner looked somewhat nonplused; evidently Nixie had answered at a sweep certain questions he had prepared. He also looked incredulous and he persisted: "Was Holt the young man's real name, Miss Allen?"

"I think so—I never heard him called anything else. I heard him tell Mr. Moreton once that he had an uncle in Chicago named Holt."

"Where was he born? Where was his home?"

"He told Mr. Moreton that he was born in Illinois and had worked in Chicago—I think he said that he had come from Chicago to New York. Mr. Moreton

never took any one without recommendations, so Holt must have furnished them."

"Do you know the address of this uncle of Holt's, Miss Allen?"

"No, I do not, but Mr. Moreton may have had it."

Nixie's answers were prompt and direct, so much so that they had a touch of challenge about them. She sat erect and looked the coroner full in the eye; she had entirely recovered from the distress which had marked her before Parker gave his testimony.

"Miss Allen, I want you to fix for us more definitely the length of time you spent with the chauffeur on the stairs."

"I have no way of telling just how long it was."

"Half an hour?"

"No, not nearly that long."

"Ten minutes?"

"It may have been as long as that."

The coroner's naturally dry voice was arid. "Detail your conversation together, perhaps then—"

"I think I can throw some light on this point, Mr. Coroner," Jowett's quiet voice interrupted.

Nixie turned swiftly and looked at him; there was a general stir in the room. Parker cursed, inwardly; he had mistaken his man then!

"I am glad to hear you speak, Mr. Jowett," the coroner said with the nearest approach to heartiness that seemed possible to him. "I have purposely not questioned you until others had testified. . . . Will you

first of all tell us how you so fortunately came to be here?"

"Mr. Moreton had sent for me," Jowett said tersely. "He telephoned me early in the evening that he had a job for me which would take me west for several weeks. He telephoned at six o'clock, told me to get the nine o'clock out, and said that at half past eleven he'd come out and have a talk with me and in the meantime I might amuse myself by keeping an eye on the house and the grounds. He laughed when he said that, as if that part of it was a joke. I got the nine o'clock and got up to the house at twenty minutes to eleven, then hung about." Jowett paused as if waiting for further questioning.

"Please continue, Mr. Jowett. Every step of yours and every observation you have made is of interest to us." The coroner was quite right, the room was tense with expectation.

"I hung around, as I said," Jowett continued, "just filling in time, and after about half an hour or so I saw Miss Allen, whom I didn't know, hadn't ever seen before. I saw her come out of the front door and go to the garage, and in a little while she and the chauffeur, who had been busy over one of the cars in the garage, started out together for the house. They disappeared in the bushes at the corner of the study. I didn't know anything about this house, didn't know there was an entrance down there, so, out of curiosity, I followed them and my flashlight showed me a door

ı the wall. I investigated and discovered a dark pas-ıgeway with a flight of stairs going up to the floor bove. Miss Allen and the chauffeur were going up the tairs when I came into the passage, the chauffeur sing his garage flashlight. They went on up and disppeared. I judged that Miss Allen was one of the amily and considered that it wasn't any of my busiess to follow them up, but out of curiosity, wonderıg mainly where such a passage could lead to, I stayed own there in the passageway, expecting every minute hat Mr. Moreton would be out looking for me. I idn't hear a sound, had no idea where the two had one to, until a light struck across the upper part of ıe stairs and then I heard exclamations followed by commotion. I ran up the stairs then and saw that /indow-door over there standing wide open and this oom full of light, the light I had noticed from below, nd people in the room—Mrs. Moreton over by the esk, the count standing by her, the doctor bending ver Mr. Moreton, who lay on the floor, Miss Allen urrying out of the room, and the butler and chauffeur tanding near by. I entered and presently Miss Allen ame in with Mr. Parker, and others came crowding ı." Jowett paused in a matter-of-fact way, as if eady for further questioning. Parker had settled ack in his seat, his face expressionless.

"How long were you in the passage below?" the oroner asked. For some reason, he had flushed; he /as eying the detective intently.

"I should say—something over ten minutes," Jowett returned with an air of careful consideration. "I know I looked at my watch immediately after I ran up to this room and it was just half past eleven."

"And you heard no sounds? No steps in the passage above or on the upper stairway or in this room?"

"No, not a sound until I saw the light flash out across the stairs above me—you noticed perhaps that the upper passage and the boxed stairway are carpeted."

"No voices?"

"No."

The coroner turned to Nixie. "You stated that you and the chauffeur talked for some time on the stairs."

"I said we talked 'for a time,'" she corrected curtly. "We talked very low—mostly in whispers, I think."

"Why in whispers?" the coroner demanded.

"Because it didn't occur to me to talk loud, and Holt whispered—I suppose because I did. It was late and most people in the house would have wondered why I was with the chauffeur. Mr. Moreton would have understood, as soon as Holt explained why he wanted to see him—I wasn't keeping quiet because I didn't want him to hear, only just because of others who might gossip—I wish Mr. Moreton had been able to hear." Again there was in her voice the note of deep emotion.

"Would you have heard a whisper, Mr. Jowett?" the coroner asked.

"I think not. . . . But that's a matter easy to determine."

"True. . . . Would you have heard sounds in this room?"

Jowett shook his head. "I doubt it—unless the sounds were decided. I heard distinctly the sounds of haste and running and mingled voices, after the alarm started. I heard no sounds whatever until then."

"No one going up or down the upper stairs or walking along the upper passage?"

"No. . . . But that is a matter which can be decided by test."

The coroner nodded. "Will you continue, please, Mr. Jowett? Will you give us an account of your movements and any discoveries you have made?"

"Certainly. . . . Nobody noticed me when I entered here, all were intent on the doctor's examination, but when Mr. Parker came in he recognized me and I asked him if there would be any objection to my examining the body, and he said, 'No.' The doctor was busied with Mrs. Moreton and I made a cursory examination. I also briefly examined the articles on the desk. I then helped carry Mrs. Moreton to her room. . . . In almost every case of sudden death, the possibility of foul play is considered—and it should be. I discussed such a possibility with Mr. Parker and he told me to go ahead. I examined this room, investigated the passageways and the stairs, went up through Mr. Moreton's room to the upper hall, looked around

generally. I had observed no marks of violence on Mr. Moreton's body, but wanted a further examination. Doctor Levene expressed the same desire and we, together, made a second examination with the result he has stated. After that, I spent some time upstairs in observation, then came down-stairs and looked this floor over, then went out to the garage, where I discovered that the chauffeur had left. Just then the head-gardener came up from the park with Holt's letter to Mr. Parker and I took charge of it and delivered it to Mr. Parker. After that I had a look about the grounds, and the garage. . . . That brings me to the time of your arrival." Jowett paused and regarded the coroner with an open countenance, like one who has made a full statement, but who is quite willing to answer any further questions.

The entire company had hung upon the detective's words; there was a blank look on most faces when he concluded. "You have scarcely answered my question, Mr. Jowett," the coroner objected after a moment's silence. "I shall be more explicit: in your investigations have you discovered anything which would warrant a suspicion of foul play?"

"I have suspected every one in the house and out of it," Jowett returned bluntly. "I've suspected everything and everybody—it's my business to suspect. I have discovered nothing which I can present to you, Mr. Coroner. I have no suspicious circumstances and no 'clues' to offer—I feel quite futile at this investiga-

tion. It's a position a detective dislikes to occupy, but there it is," and Jowett settled back in his seat with an air of finality.

"Your admission, in itself, is most important," the coroner answered with extreme gravity, and then he turned to the whispering jury. There was a stir throughout the room, and more than one audible sigh. Parker had been watching Nixie; she had listened to Jowett with breathless attention, and, at his conclusion, her face was alight. She half rose, as if to leave the room, then sank back and drew the granite mask over her features; her eyes were again fixed on Moreton's still form.

The coroner turned from an undertoned consultation with the jury, and the room instantly settled into attention.

XVIII

MOTIVES

"'MATHEW MORETON died from the effects of poison administered by his own hand,'" Driscoll repeated in a low voice. He looked up at Parker. "It's not the truth," he said solemnly.

"Such was their decision," Parker returned.

As soon as the inquest was over, Parker had touched Driscoll's arm. "Come with me to your room—I want to talk to you," he said, and Driscoll had followed him from the study. When they reached his room, Driscoll had dropped into a chair by the table. His white face, which the bright light made ghastly, the slackness of his big body, his heavy eyes, his entire personality expressed complete depression; more than that, a sort of sick misery.

He looked haggardly at Parker. "Their decision, yes," he said. He looked away then, out over the lake and into the farther distance. "But it's not the truth," he reiterated with settled conviction. "You noticed Uncle Mathew's expression last night—the jury didn't see that and no one told of it. His features have settled—he looks peaceful this morning, but I'll never

›rget that look of fighting rage. . . . It's not the ·uth, Parker."

"Better for us to accept it as such—for the present," 'arker answered.

Driscoll's eyes came back from the distance. "This ; not the end of it, then? . . . I've felt it wasn't. 'hat whole inquest struck me as a farce which it was est to maintain, practically every one working for the ame end. Nixie was pretty honest, for she said, 'He ·ould never have done *that!*' but she was hiding some-ıing, too, like most of the rest of us."

Parker was lighting a cigar; he snapped the match ı two and flung it down. "Their decision amounts to othing—it's only the beginning!"

Driscoll spoke with sudden fire. "Parker, don't run ff with a wrong idea—Nixie had no hand in it! I'd ake my oath on it, every day of the year! That amned dog-in-the-manger jealousy of Aunt Lilian's! could have choked her when she let out all that enom! It was so much the worse because she believes very word she uttered. Uncle Mathew obsessed to the oint of suicide by Nixie! Or by Aunt Lilian's jealusy either, for that matter! *She's* been the one obessed! A perfect *hell* she made of it here, and what onder that Uncle Mathew turned to Nixie for com-ort. He simply adored Nixie—he loved every hair of er head. But there was nothing wrong about his de-otion. He was unloved and childless and Nixie was is one comfort—he clung to her and he adored her."

Driscoll paused for breath and shook his shoulders impatiently. "I could have said all this at the inquest, but to what purpose? It would only have given point to Aunt Lilian's insinuations. It seemed to me the less said the better. . . . *Lord,* what a mess! And there's bound to be more of it."

Parker regarded him thoughtfully. "And did Miss Allen love your uncle?" he asked.

Driscoll flung up his uninjured hand. "Ask me something I know! . . . It's not easy to tell about Nixie, Parker. A less demonstrative, more secretive, more determined-willed woman never existed—or a more intense and fiery woman—under the surface. I don't know another girl who'd have been capable of holding her place in this family, as Nixie has, in the face of Aunt Lilian's jealousy, just going quietly on when the ground was red-hot under her feet and the air stifling, outwardly indifferent to Uncle Mathew's devotion, inwardly indifferent, too, for all I really know. Yet she stuck to him loyally. Fine though the old man was, I believe he would have gone on the loose, but for Nixie. She held him straight. She was Uncle Mathew's right hand and his right eye, and yet, not an act, not a look of which Aunt Lilian could take any real advantage. Nixie's a wonder, Parker. I've gone down before her, and I don't care if you know it, either." He straightened and squared his shoulders. "And you just take it from me: if any one

tries to fix this thing on Nixie, I'll do something that will surprise people!" Then he suddenly dropped back into depression. "Nobody knows better than I what a jealous drink-crazed man is capable of," he muttered. Then more clearly, "I don't know, Parker, whether Nixie loved Uncle Mathew or not—I used to think that she loved power better than anything else—but for a long time I've been uncertain whether Nixie dearly loved Uncle Mathew or whether she simply had an immense pity for him. . . . I don't know."

"What do you know about that chauffeur?" Parker asked abruptly.

Driscoll instantly stiffened. "Nothing! I never gave him a thought—until last night!" He sprang up and walked restlessly about. "It struck me that Nixie was trying to shield him, at the inquest. . . . I've always thought that some day Nixie'd really love, and then it would be all over with her—the unreclaimed circus-woman would show in her. . . . But that ordinary, strapping fellow—" He whirled on Parker. "What's her interest in him, anyway?"

"Mainly his interest in her, I imagine!" Parker flashed out. There was as much restless irritation in his answer as there was in Driscoll's question.

"Another case of pity, you think?" Driscoll demanded jealously.

Parker had quickly taken himself in hand. "Very likely," he said composedly.

"She wouldn't take to him, surely? That statement of his was well expressed, but it's my belief some one wrote it for him. Why, the man's got a pugilist's mug on him—he's common and rough, a chauffeur!"

"Has it occurred to you that possibly Miss Allen's acquaintance with him dates back to the circus days?"

"Lord, no! . . . What makes you think that?"

"He looks the type, doesn't he?"

"Yes—I suppose he does—" Driscoll conceded in a troubled way. "And you think he's mad over Nixie, of course?"

"It certainly looks that way to me."

Driscoll cursed through his teeth.

"Let's let that be for a while, Driscoll—tell me, does Burke like Miss Allen?"

"Devoted to her. . . . The servants all like her."

"Speaks well for her," Parker said briefly. "Burke's known her ever since she came into the family, hasn't he?"

"Yes. Burke's not butler for the town house, only for Moreton House. He's out here the year round, and so is Nixie—that is, she was until last winter. Aunt Lilian took her to the town house last winter to keep her under her eye, I suppose. Nixie and her governess, Burke and a couple of servants, that used to be the household out here during the winter months, and Uncle Mathew used to slip down here and play around with Nixie, like any kid on a holiday, or a father with his pet child, until Nixie grew into an out-

and-out beauty and Aunt Lilian put a stop to it. This last winter Nixie's had no governess, but I think that the maid Aunt Lilian had for years acted as spy on Nixie. Three months ago the creature had an operation and didn't get over it, and Aunt Lilian's had a succession of maids since then and Nixie's been freer from surveillance, I fancy. Nixie's had a bad time of it altogether, and I guess it's true that Uncle Mathew wanted to get her away from it all, set her up for herself, a proposition that to Aunt Lilian would be like a red rag to an angry bull."

Parker continued his questions. "Burke's a safe sort, Driscoll, loyal and close-mouthed?"

"Old Burke? Tight as an oyster. . . . Burke doesn't approve of me, I can't blame him for that. He's a bit sly, I think, but I've got to confess that he served Uncle Mathew faithfully, and Nixie too—he's loyal, all right."

"I'm glad to have all the side-lights I can on what's happened," Parker remarked.

Driscoll paused in his walk and faced him. He looked desperately anxious, but resolute. "I'm willing to give you all the side-lights I can, but I want to know first where you stand. We think the same, Parker, that Uncle Mathew never took that dose of his own free will? That some one forced it on him?"

"I'm not prepared to say that your uncle did not take his own life," Parker returned.

"Oh, quit being a lawyer for a few minutes and

speak out!" Driscoll exclaimed. "Accuse me if you want to—only say what you actually think!"

"I'm not accusing anybody, even in my own mind," Parker answered equably. "I'm trying to weigh every circumstance carefully. . . . What I want is to talk this thing over with you, Driscoll—discuss motives rather than individuals."

"Go ahead. Lord knows, I want light on the subject!"

"Well, let us consider this household, then—we'll begin with Mrs. Moreton; we'll grant that she and her husband did not love each other, that their relations were decidedly strained; moreover, that Mrs. Moreton has been distracted by jealousy. But you agree with me, don't you, that her having any part in that crime is highly unlikely?"

"Out of the question!" Driscoll said decidedly. "Besides, there were witnesses to prove that she never left the veranda."

"I know that, she was accounted for and so were a number of others. What I want to get at is: would she be capable of conniving with some one to commit that crime—had she a motive?"

"Aunt Lilian couldn't have had a hand in it," Driscoll declared. "I know Aunt Lilian so well: she gets angry and goes off the handle, she'll row endlessly and she nags and nags and magnifies her suspicions, but she's mentally and physically incapable of being a criminal. She's the kind of coward that's bound hand

and foot by the conventions. Aunt Lilian is a good deal of a fool, a confirmed faddist forever straining after small effects, a nervous, suspicious, worrying sort and spiteful in a small way, just the most trying proposition on earth to live with—the spoiled child kind—but a highly proper woman withal. Aunt Lilian couldn't be a criminal if she tried."

"Her horror in the study bore every mark of genuineness."

"Of course she was horrified. She's still horrified over it all and always will be, but it doesn't prevent her from having her hair dressed and putting on black, and it won't prevent her from clinging to her suspicions and losing her temper when she's crossed and having it in for Nixie and feeling important over being a wealthy widow and the like. That's just Aunt Lilian. . . . She had no hand in it, Parker."

"Nor any of the servants? They struck me as a pretty decent lot and very fond of Mr. Moreton. They accounted for themselves and for one another. Besides, Driscoll, whoever committed that murder, if it was a murder, was skilled and intelligent—therefore we may conclude that there was a well-defined motive. . . . Had the doctor any animus?"

"Levene!" Driscoll exclaimed. "Not he! I know a lot about Levene. He's not bad-hearted, just a rather clever effeminate sort, eager to make his way. He's especially fitted to doctor middle-aged half-hypochondriacs like Aunt Lilian. Why, he's an ultra-conven-

tional ass—he'd fall dead at the mere thought of jeopardizing his much-prized social position! He's been suffering agonies at the thought that his happen-so connection with this business might hurt his position. He's been aiming right along for Elfreda Craxton's set. There are some pretty decent things about Levene—I know for a fact that he means to go over and do his bit—he'll have his commission in a few days. In his case, there'd not be a shadow of a motive. He admired Uncle Mathew immensely and many's the time he smoothed out Aunt Lilian's tempers. He's always been semi-physicianally devoted to Aunt Lilian, that's his way with all his good-paying lady patients, they want to be treated that way. Aunt Lilian's nothing to him but a good-paying patient, and Aunt Lilian has smiled on him merely because the devoted services of a young society physician—which would be her definition of him—flatters her vanity. Aunt Lilian likes to look interesting and to be told that she's 'alluring.' She's not altogether a hypochondriac either—she really does suffer and often really needs a doctor."

Parker showed genuine interest in Driscoll's analyses. "The doctor has two good witnesses to his movements after dinner," he commented.

"It couldn't have been Levene," Driscoll repeated.

"You appear to have thought him out pretty well."

"I've thought over every person and every possibility until my head aches," Driscoll answered with sudden weariness.

"So have I," Parker confessed. "But let's go on: Von Betler, Driscoll?"

"I've considered Von Betler—and the count," Driscoll said thoughtfully "I've turned them over and over in my mind, but I can't see it, Parker. The thing's impossible, viewed in the light of a German plot with either of those two implicated. And in these days the first thing one's mind jumps to is the possibility of a German plot. I've known Von Betler ever since I was a boy. He's a gentleman and a pretty fine sort and his wife's the stanchest little American alive. It's true that before we declared war Von Betler sided more or less with Germany, a thing Uncle Mathew couldn't forgive, but it's also true that since we've been in it Von Betler has worked heart and hand for America. He's gone in openly for the anti-German propaganda work we are doing in this country. His father was a Prussian, that's the worst that can be said against him. And the count's not a German or a German sympathizer. Long before the war ever began I heard him express himself about Prussianism—he was entirely out of sympathy with German autocracy. And he's always kept himself clear of the rich Germans in New York. He knows the best people in the city, many of them intimately—Aunt Lilian secured something of a lion when she got Gansingen out here for a week-end, and naturally she was in a rage when Uncle Mathew snubbed him. Uncle Mathew didn't know anything against him—he was simply completely out

of patience with Aunt Lilian's silly running after foreigners. She thinks it's smart to have them about—'Count this' or 'Lord that'—it sounds well. I doubt whether Uncle Mathew knew who Gansingen was—Uncle Mathew gave up society long ago—left the whole thing to Aunt Lilian. I've known Gansingen for some time and I like him. He's one of the most charming men socially that I've ever known. It's true, too, that he wants the government to give him a job—he's ready to go on ambulance service or anything they want him to do."

Parker nodded. "It's inconceivable from any angle it's viewed. A murder plot is a pretty serious thing. And, after Moreton's attitude at dinner, Von Betler and the count would be the first to come under suspicion, even a mad Hun could foresee that. To strike Moreton down immediately after that scene at dinner—or to permit such a thing to be done—would be the surest way to court suspicion. Besides, Driscoll, there was no earthly reason for any particular German animus against Moreton. He was an earnest patriot, but so are hundreds of others. It's true he runs those steel mills and had government contracts, but killing Moreton wouldn't stop his steel output or cancel his contracts—the mills would go on just the same. I know his business affairs pretty well—Moreton was not engaged in a single undertaking that would bring German wrath upon him. Moreton expressed himself freely, but so has every patriot in the country—every

one's expressing himself some way or another. . . . There must be a *motive* for a crime like that, and in looking for it in this direction I don't find it."

"Nor I. I don't believe there's a single real German sympathizer in the house—unless possibly Mrs. Insmann, and the Von Betlers accounted for her after dinner. A woman couldn't have done that thing anyway—no woman could accomplish a Powell murder, she hasn't the wrist strength."

"Hardly woman's work," Parker said, "but stranger things have happened. Still, as far as Mrs. Insmann is concerned, I judge her to be of the martyr-pacifist order, nothing worse. . . . You followed the Powell case, then, Driscoll?"

"I was one of the reporters at the trial," Driscoll answered uncomfortably. "I was reading the whole thing over again, yesterday afternoon, in Hoffman's book on *Poisons and Some Strange Cases*. . . . I wish I'd never seen that damned book!" He did not look at Parker; he looked down.

"I remember you asked your uncle about it. To whom does it belong?"

"I don't know. . . . I know it oughtn't to be allowed out of a psychopathist's library."

Parker dropped the subject. "We come then to the person to whom we both have given the most thought," he said practically, "and that's the chauffeur. . . . We'll leave Miss Allen out of the matter, Driscoll, except in as far as her evident faith in Holt may have

led her to shield him from suspicion by emphasizing the short time it took her to search for Mr. Moreton. If, as she insisted, she went through Mr. Moreton's room and her own and down to the library, turned and came back immediately, the crime could scarcely have been committed by the chauffeur during her absence, for by going through the performance at the request of the jury, she demonstrated to us all that it takes just six minutes to hurry through Moreton's room, pass through her own, run down the stairs and look into the library, and return to the landing where both she and the chauffeur declared he was waiting. . . . Now, Driscoll, Jowett told me last night that, by his watch, exactly twenty-five minutes passed between the time Miss Allen and Holt entered the basement and the moment when Jowett himself entered the study. In that case, there are certainly about fifteen minutes, in addition to the six, to be accounted for. Now—"

"Twenty-five minutes!" Driscoll interrupted sharply. "He didn't tell us that at the inquest! He said he waited 'something over ten minutes.' I never dreamed that twenty-five minutes had passed—nor did the jury! Why, Parker, Levene has insisted that Uncle Mathew hadn't been dead more than twenty minutes." Driscoll was greatly perturbed.

"Jowett slurred the fact, and for good reasons of his own, I fancy," Parker returned dryly.

"What reasons?" Driscoll demanded.

"Because he knows that this is only the beginning."

"That's the reason his testimony was so innocuous, eh? He wants a free hand and all the glory?"

"He certainly wants a free hand. . . . Jowett's a pretty clever man, Driscoll. He knows exactly what he's about, and I fancy it's not all glory he's after. He certainly wanted this inquest to terminate exactly as it did."

"You worked to that end, too, Parker."

Parker merely shrugged, then continued. "Now you see the importance of those minutes Miss Allen and Holt either did or did not spend together. If Miss Allen was absent on her search for ten or twelve minutes, not six, a powerful man like Holt, if he was skilled, could have done the thing—no doubt of it. If Miss Allen was away only the six minutes, and they had fifteen or so minutes together, the thing could not have been done by the chauffeur without Miss Allen's knowledge. But, Driscoll," Parker added quickly, for Driscoll had begun to walk the floor, "remember that Levene's statement would not convince a jury. Under the present circumstances, no physician could decide to the minute when your uncle died. He may have died one minute or two or even five minutes before Miss Allen and Holt looked into the study—any jury would give them the benefit of the doubt. . . . But it's the chauffeur we're considering now—his possible motive. We don't share Miss Allen's evident faith in the man. You think him the possible criminal, don't you?"

"Yes, I do," Driscoll confessed. "I believe the man had a reason for being here, and his making off looks bad. . . . You see, Parker, Nixie had a lonely time of it, Aunt Lilian won't let her see people, and this fellow may have imposed on her. If she had faith in him, she'd try to shield him—she's that sort. I can't get the German plot idea out of my head; Uncle Mathew had such an out-and-out detestation of the whole tribe. If Holt was a German agent, we don't have to look far for a motive."

"There's always the possibility of private revenge," Parker suggested quietly. "Jealousy, some fancied insult, any one of half a dozen things."

Driscoll paused abruptly in his walk. "If Holt was madly in love with Nixie and he suspected, misunderstood, I mean, the character of Uncle Mathew's love for Nixie—and was jealous . . . I know what that sort of thing is like . . . why, Parker—" He stopped.

"Exactly," Parker answered. "But not in sudden anger, Driscoll, for whoever committed that murder —*if* it was a murder—I persist in that 'if'—whoever committed that crime had the Powell case in mind and had planned his course, else how came he to have the hydrocyanic?"

Driscoll stood still, considering, his brows drawn. Then he sighed heavily. "It's beyond me!" he said. "I can't help feeling, though, that Holt may be the man."

"But you realize, of course, that if Holt should be

accused of the crime and arrested, Miss Allen would almost certainly be dragged in as an accomplice?"

"Realize! I've done nothing but realize, from the moment Nixie told her story in the study and I saw how Holt hung on her words!" Driscoll exclaimed in despair.

"Well, Holt's not arrested yet," Parker said briskly. "Let's not borrow trouble. There are several other possibilities for us to consider, Driscoll: there remain for our consideration, myself, yourself and Jowett—and the possible—"

"Jowett!" Driscoll interrupted in amazement.

"We agreed to consider everybody, didn't we?" Parker returned composedly.

"Yes, but Jowett never entered my head!"

"Hasn't it occurred to you that of all the people connected with last night's tragedy, myself, yourself and Jowett are the only ones who have no one to vouch for our movements after dinner?" Parker answered with a sort of grim amusement. "Even the chauffeur has Miss Allen's testimony to the effect that he had only six minutes to himself. . . . Well, let us begin with Everitt Parker as the possible criminal?"

"It's no time for joking, Parker."

"I think myself that it would be rather difficult to persuade a jury that I killed Mathew Moreton, though I have no doubt there are those who have carefully canvassed the possibility. . . . Yourself, Driscoll?"

"My God, no!" Driscoll said with passionate em-

phasis. "I growled at the old man sometimes, but I respected him and loved him." His eyes filled with tears.

"How about Jowett?"

"You're not serious, Parker?"

"Why not?" Parker demanded. "Find a motive and, for all I can see, Jowett's as likely a suspect as any one of us. He's intelligent, well enough acquainted with the Powell murder and others to plan the thing skilfully. He certainly was about the place last night unchaperoned. It's often the least likely person who finally proves to be the criminal, Driscoll."

"I give it up!" Driscoll said with a gesture expressive of bewilderment.

"Not till we've considered the last possibility," Parker persisted. "This house is not inaccessible—that basement door was not locked, and when I came in at quarter past ten the front door stood open. Well, what was to hinder some outsider from sneaking in that way and up-stairs and down again to the study through Moreton's room, and being startled by sounds of steps on the basement stairs—those stairs aren't carpeted—escaping up the boxed stairway, through Moreton's room, and possibly out again by the front door. . . . I tell you, Driscoll, if the circumstances were a little different, I'd thrill over getting this case before a grand jury! I'd make them see double and *luxuriate* in doing it!"

There were in Everitt Parker a few drops of blood

of the wandering tribe; American for four generations, of Puritan ancestry, but dowered nevertheless by a dark ancestress; some time in the past a Rachel had been united to a Puritan Parker. The "incalculably valuable drops" were his, the inheritance which has produced three-fifths of the world's creative leaven and four-fifths of her dramatic expression. Son of a blue-eyed mother and a blond father, he was dark, aquiline, and warm-tinted. For a brief few moments his dark face was alight, his slim fingers aquiver; he had flung out his hands, palms up, a gesture in which he never indulged, except when moved.

Driscoll Moreton studied him anxiously. "But you'll not stir muddy water, Parker? I swear Nixie couldn't have had a hand in it, and she'd be drenched with dirt, if this thing came into court."

Parker's hands dropped and he spoke very quietly. "I stir muddy water? No. . . . But some one else will do that, or I'm no prophet."

"Jowett?"

"Probably—or some one else, very certainly."

"And we?"

"Sit tight and hold our tongues—and if it comes to a fight, *fight*. . . . I've told you I could make a jury see double."

"You'll stand by Nixie then, Parker?" Driscoll asked eagerly.

"Your uncle appointed me her counsel," Parker answered succinctly.

Driscoll drew a long breath. "I feel better!" he said with profound relief. "I have a lot of confidence in you, Parker. . . . And now I'll tell you something: you remember Aunt Lilian was questioned about there being poison in the house? Well, I know that there was. Yesterday afternoon I went to Uncle Mathew's medicine-cupboard—you know how I am when I have a spree coming on, a damned aching and restlessness that gets the best of me. I was awfully keen on keeping a clear head and I was looking for a sedative—aspirin helps me sometimes. Well, there wasn't any aspirin, but there in plain view was a bottle of hydrocyanic, plainly labeled."

Parker's face had lost all expression. "You didn't tell of it at the inquest," he said.

"No—" Driscoll answered slowly. "I considered and then I didn't. . . . It was Aunt Lilian who was questioned, you remember, not I. I'd decided that the less said the better. . . . The bottle I saw wasn't the one on the desk, Parker; it was larger and almost half full. I've been to Uncle Mathew's medicine-cupboard before, other times I've been out here, but I never saw that bottle before. When I saw it, I thought, 'What's Uncle Mathew got that stuff about for?' but it didn't make any great impression on me. When I was reading Hoffman's book I thought of it again, then forgot it, for I'd been out in the dining-room and had had a drink or two. . . . But, Parker, after we carried Aunt Lilian up last night, I went first thing

and looked in the medicine-cupboard, and the bottle wasn't there; it wasn't anywhere about. . . . I didn't tell this at the inquest for I was so dead afraid that in some way it might be used against Nixie." He stopped.

Parker had been thinking intently. "It's as well you didn't mention it," he said rather absently. "Jowett, of course, overhauled that medicine-cupboard, he wouldn't let a thing like that pass, but, if the bottle was gone when you looked, it was not there when Jowett made his investigation. . . . It's a bit of evidence, I must say," he added in the same preoccupied way. "That bottle must be about, somewhere—it's not so easy to do away with a bottle. . . . Tell me, did you notice any empty one-ounce bottles in the cupboard, like the one on the study desk?"

"No, every bottle had something in it and I don't remember seeing any bottle as small as that." Driscoll regarded Parker's preoccupation anxiously. "Do you think the thing could be used against Nixie?" he asked, then added with a touch of defiance, "I think it's a much more certain proof that Uncle Mathew *may* have thought of suicide. I wish now I had come forward with it at the inquest."

Parker aroused somewhat. "No, I'm glad you didn't happen to be questioned. We'll keep the thing to ourselves for the present—we'll have to. . . . Driscoll, we've had a pretty full talk, and we understand each other; we're both looking to Miss Allen's interests.

Now there's something I want you to do—I want you to get into town to your office and find out what your paper means to do in the way of a story of this thing. There're bound to be reporters out here, I wonder they haven't appeared before this, but I have an idea that their papers won't allow them to say much—I fancy the lid's already on. You go in and find out."

"You think the Secret Service is on to it?" Driscoll asked quickly.

"Like as not. But if your paper wants a story, you're prepared to give it to them, just the surface facts and the gist of the inquest—and don't forget to emphasize Miss Allen's *extreme youth* and characterize the chauffeur as a *boy*. Also speak of Miss Allen as Mathew Moreton's *adopted and well-beloved daughter;* speak of her frantic distress and eager search for help when she and the *young* chauffeur made the discovery, and be sure to mention Mr. Moreton's anxiety over the strike at the mills and his strenuous activity during this last hot week. . . . But I don't need to tell you your business—there's no man in New York better qualified than you are to write a skilful story."

"I intended to go in and give them a story, if they wanted it. . . . You think then that the Secret Service may take a hand in this?"

"I don't know a thing more about it than you do, Driscoll. I do think, though, that in a case like this anything is possible, so you make haste into town,

Driscoll. I'll get in as soon as I can, and then I'll telephone you."

"I'll get the next train," Driscoll said with energy, and he looked at his watch.

"That's right!" Parker returned with satisfaction. "Keep going and don't brood." He put his hand on Driscoll's shoulder. "And, my boy, *cut the whisky.* If the ache gets you, think of Nixie—think of your uncle —you remember what you said to me last night. Things may not go altogether well with Nixie, Driscoll—we'll need to have clear heads. . . . Don't brood over impossibilities, my boy—and don't *drink!*"

The tears gathered in Driscoll's eyes. He did not trust himself to speak; he merely nodded in a decided way and went out. And in a few minutes Parker also left the room.

XIX

THE POCKET-CASE

WHEN Parker reached the first floor, he found that the coroner's party had gone, that the master of Moreton House had been borne to his room. The study had been cleared of all signs of the recent inquest, had been restored to its usual state, and Burke was busied now in the library. Under his direction, a maid was dusting and setting things to rights. The little butler looked wan and tired, but he showed no diminution of energy. When Parker appeared, he looked at him in a veiled yet wholly respectful way.

"Have you seen Mr. Jowett?" Parker asked.

"He went to the garage, sir—immediately after the inquest."

"And where is Miss Allen, Burke?"

"I've not seen her since the inquest, sir. . . . Mrs. Moreton's orders were to get these rooms in order at once, as the funeral will be to-morrow morning, so I have been occupied here, sir."

"What are the plans for the funeral?" Parker asked.

"A simple service by the clergyman from Ford's Landing, sir, and only the family present, and then the body taken into town. . . . If I see Miss Allen, I shall tell her you wish to see her, sir?"

"Yes, please, Burke."

Parker started into the hall, then drew back, for the Von Betlers and Mrs. Insmann were coming down the stairs. From the library window, Parker watched their departure. Mrs. von Betler seemed ill; her husband had to lift her into the automobile and she sank back as if completely exhausted. They were whirled away from Moreton House by a chauffeur who craned his neck for a final look at the house; evidently the news of the tragedy had traveled.

"The count has gone, I suppose?" Parker asked of Burke.

"A few minutes ago, sir—his car came out from town to get him."

"Have any reporters appeared yet?" Parker asked.

"Several telephone calls only, sir, which Mrs. Moreton, through Doctor Levene, declined to answer."

"The doctor is remaining for a time, Burke?"

"I believe so, sir."

Parker said nothing more. Von Betler's automobile had disappeared, and Parker went out to the garage. He found Jowett seated in an easy attitude and smoking. His hat and cane were on the bench beside him; he looked ready for departure.

"Are you about to leave us?" Parker asked pleasantly.

Jowett also smiled. "Yes, I'm ready to go—I'm simply waiting for a long-distance message. . . . I

wanted to see you, too—I've just come across a bit of evidence, Mr. Parker."

"Too bad you couldn't have presented it at the inquest," Parker said with perfect gravity.

Jowett grinned. Then he said grimly, "Yes—too bad, isn't it? I wonder just how Mr. William *Henry* and his precious jury would have found, if some of us had attempted to squash his prearranged decision, instead of assisting him to the best of our ability."

"You think it was 'prearranged,' do you?"

"The gentleman spelled his name differently, once upon a time—that's all I can tell you just at present, Mr. Parker," Jowett said meaningly.

"I think I can guess," Parker returned. "But what's this new discovery of yours?"

"Come on in here and I'll show you," and Jowett led the way through the chauffeur's bedroom and into an adjoining closet, evidently the chauffeur's clothes-closet, for a cap and a much-besmudged pair of overalls hung from the pegs. In the back of the closet was a shelf, high up, about six inches from the ceiling.

Jowett pointed to the shelf. "See that? . . . Well, when I was searching about here before the inquest, following Miss Allen's tracks, it never occurred to me to look on that shelf, though an examination of the floor showed me that she had been in this room—the shelf seemed too blatantly evident a hiding-place. Instead I mussed myself up back in the tool-room. . . . But when I came here after the inquest, I got

a stool and had a look at the shelf, and this is what I found, wrapped in this cloth and thrust back in a far corner." Jowett took a paper parcel from his pocket and unrolled it, a square of soft dusting material, like several others hanging in the garage, wrapped about a bottle which was a quarter full of a colorless liquid.

Jowett handed the bottle to Parker. "Don't touch the glass," he warned. "Keep the cloth between the glass and your fingers."

Parker read the label, which was hand-printed on a square of white paper, the lettering very perfectly done:

"HYDROCYANIC ACID, POISON."

"Take the cork out carefully and smell of it," Jowett said.

Parker did so and nodded.

"Unmistakable—that odor?"

"Hydrocyanic certainly," Parker returned. He gave the bottle to Jowett and the detective carefully re-wrapped it and replaced it in his pocket. If he intended to speak, he was hindered, for the garage telephone rang sharply.

"I'll leave if you like?" Parker suggested.

"No, stay—I've something to say when I've finished with the telephone," and Jowett hurried out.

Parker followed in leisurely fashion and seated himself on the bench. He listened keenly enough, but there was nothing to be had from the one-sided conversation.

"Yes—yep, yep. . . . Repeat—didn't get that last? . . . Yep, have it now. . . . All *right*-o!" Parker gathered that the message Jowett was receiving was in code; the snatches of jargon hollowly vibrating through the telephone were quite unintelligible to Parker.

Jowett hung up the receiver and turned briskly to Parker. He looked at his watch as he came. "I'm going to get the next train," he announced, "but I've got an extra five minutes in which to apologize."

"Go ahead," Parker said easily, but his color rose.

"You've discovered, of course, Mr. Parker, that sometime last night, while you slept on the divan, your pockets were picked, all of them that could be reached, and that some one must have picked the lock of your bag? I found two things in your bag that interested me, one a crumpled bath-towel, and another, Doctor Hoffman's book on *Poisons and Some Strange Cases.* It's a new publication and he cites the Powell case, among others; the pages on the Powell case are well thumbed. Then, in the inside breast pocket of your coat I found a case with two small flat bottles, one marked 'Chloroform,' another 'Hydrocyanic Acid.' The bottle marked 'Chloroform' was empty, the other bottle was full to the cork. . . . I apologize for taking possession of your property, but it seemed necessary." If there was satisfaction or triumph or a desire to prod, beneath Jowett's words, he succeeded perfectly in concealing everything but a certain even politeness.

Parker's eyes had not shifted from the detective's; his slightly heightened color was his only betrayal of emotion, whether of anger or perturbation it would be difficult to tell. "Yes, I discovered my pocket had been picked as soon as I put on my coat this morning, and when I went to my room I missed my bath-towel and the book," he said with the merest touch of thickness in his speech. "You're welcome to the rest of the loot, Jowett, but I'd like that pocket-case as soon as you see fit to return it. I'm attached to that pocket-case, I've carried it for over ten years—just a fad of mine."

There was no little admiration in the look Jowett gave the lawyer, and there was a note of genuine regret in his answer. "Sorry I can't promise about the pocket-case, Mr. Parker, but I'll do my best. I guess my best is my duty."

"You're perfectly in the right," Parker answered without a trace of either embarrassment or anger. "I judge you're going to carry all this to the right quarter?"

"I am. It's too big a thing for me to handle."

Parker nodded. "I felt sure you'd reached that conclusion," and he rose. He was a graceful man, light on his feet and with the swing and force of perfect health about him; he appeared even more alertly erect than usual. "If you're going to the station, I'll go as far as the house with you," he added, and he led the way, his face impassive, his manner easy.

XX

GIVE ME YOUR CONFIDENCE

AS Parker watched Jowett swing off down the terraces his brows lowered into a frown. Then he turned and looked about him; there was no one in sight, and he stood too close to the house to be easily seen from the windows above. A few feet away was the corner filled with shrubbery which Jowett had described as hiding the entrance to the basement; it also screened Parker from any one who might be on the veranda.

Parker passed behind the bushes, found the basement door and tried it. It was not locked and he entered the passageway, a tunnel-like place with a stairway at its farther end. When he closed the door, Parker was in semi-darkness. He could distinguish the stairway, however, and he quickly ascended and found himself in the upper passage, which was much lighter, for there was a window at the farther end, evidently designed to light the passage and the boxed stairway which led up to Moreton's bedroom. Halfway down the passage was the window-door into the study, closed and its blind drawn.

Together with the coroner's jury, Parker had can-

assed this wing of the house, so he wasted no time in ooking about him, but went straight on to the foot of he boxed stairway. And there he came upon the per- on he was seeking, Nixie, standing on the second tep, head craned, lips parted, and eyes blazing. The ieavy carpeting deadened the sound of footsteps, but Nixie had evidently heard his approach, for her atti- ude was one of intent listening. When Parker strode ipon her hiding-place and suddenly faced her, she gasped.

"I'm sorry—I didn't mean to frighten you!" he said n his pleasantest manner. "I looked everywhere for you, before the inquest, and afterward it occurred to ne that you might be here."

"I'm not frightened—" she said breathlessly, "I— thought it was some one else." The fire in her eyes died; she looked white and very tired, then, and her whole attitude was an anxious question, "What do you want with me?"

Parker replied to it in his kindliest tones. "I simply wanted to talk a little with you, before going back into town. . . . Won't you come down to the lake with me? You look very tired and it's pleasant down there."

Nixie shook her head. "I'd rather stay here."

"We'll talk here then—we're not likely to be dis- turbed."

Parker could not understand why she had spent most of the morning in that hot, airless place. He was

certain now that immediately after breakfast she had hurried to her present hiding-place and that, except for the time she had spent in the garage, she had not emerged from it until the coroner and his party had begun their investigations. He felt quite as certain that Burke had known where she was. At the coroner's departure, she had evidently again taken up her post. Parker hoped to discover the reason; he hoped to discover much from Nixola Allen. His anxiety, as well as his interest and curiosity, had reached an almost unmanageable pitch.

Nixie offered no explanation, however; simply seated herself on the step, and Parker sat down beside her. She was a little thing, and he could look down on her, a mass of crisp, live curls that escaped from the knot at the back of her head and rebelled against even the ribbon band which attempted to keep them from falling over her face, a fore-shortened view of long lashes, piquant nose, full firm-set lips. Her loosely belted and uncorseted frock gave her the much coveted straight lines, but Parker saw that it covered firm curves; she was small-framed but muscular, slim little hands, tiny feet, but the well-developed leg of the professional acrobat. And Parker's downward glance discovered something else which interested him; her hands, clasped in her lap, held a bunch of keys, a number of keys, so many that her hands could not cover them. . . . Had she been trying to gain access to the study?

"I want to get back to town as soon as possible," Parker continued easily, "but first there are several things I must talk over with you. I shall see you tomorrow, for Burke tells me that the funeral will be in the morning, and that means that I shall have to come out with the will, but I may not have a chance to talk with you before the will is read."

Nixie stiffened and her eyes widened. "Does the will have to be read so soon?"

"Immediately after the funeral, Miss Nixie. That is one of the provisions of the will."

She looked down and Parker saw her features set in the expression that hardened her face, the bleak grim look she had worn throughout almost the entire inquest.

"You know the disposition Mr. Moreton made of his property, Miss Nixie?" Parker continued.

"In a general way," she answered without raising her eyes. "He told me he intended to provide for me."

"He has, and I foresee trouble. . . . Now, I do not want to force your confidence, but Mr. Moreton appointed me your counsel, and I mean to do my best to see you through the complications which are almost certain to follow. To do so I should be armed by a complete understanding. What I want you to do is to be quite open with me, for you know, of course, that whatever a client tells her legal adviser is held in strict confidence. If there are circumstances which are unknown to others, or which you would shrink

from having others know, but with which I ought to be acquainted in order to protect you and your interests, please confide them to me. Only by a complete knowledge of every circumstance connecting you with Mr. Moreton—and his family—will I be able to guard you against a very possibly painful situation. I want to fulfill my trust to the very best of my ability." Parker spoke with great gentleness, but also with firmness.

Nixie was silent for a long moment; then she said evenly, "There is nothing I can tell, Mr. Parker."

"I am your friend—please believe me, Miss Nixie, and trust me," he said earnestly. As he spoke, he put his hand on hers.

She shrank from him and her answer was resolute, "I am sorry, but I have nothing to tell you, Mr. Parker."

Parker flushed, for her distrust of him was so evident. She both distrusted and feared him, and yet, in what she realized was her desperate strait, she depended on him. Twice she had appealed to him, once in the study, in Jowett's presence, when she had said, "I know Mr. Moreton wanted you to look after his affairs—if he should die—even little things," and again when he had been called upon at the inquest and she had turned and looked at him; there had been desperate appeal in her eyes then. And on both occasions he had stood by her.

In his irritation, Parker was tempted to frighten

her into complete dependence on him; he was even tempted to make a distant reference to that night at the hotel, say *something* which would draw from her a confession. . . . Then Parker's usual coolness reminded him that she most certainly sensed his opinion of her; she knew that he must have drawn certain conclusions, since that night at the hotel, and in either case, whether she was or was not guarding a shameful secret, it was natural that she should shrink from him. He also reminded himself, rather grimly, that time was certain to accomplish the thing he sought. If he was any judge, Nixola Allen would be in about as sore straits as it was possible for a woman to be. . . . And, as he looked down at the hand he had touched, he told himself that he had made a mistake. His act had been involuntary, prompted by an attraction he was much too clear-headed to deny. From the first moment he had seen her, and in spite of everything, she had attracted him and he had made her cause his, to an extent that fairly appalled him, viewed in the light of recent developments. . . . The flush left Parker's face and his expression became impassive.

"I understand," he said quietly. "You will feel more confidence in me later on, so I won't press for explanations now. . . . But at the risk of being disagreeable, there are a few questions I must ask: to your knowledge, have you any living relative?"

She drew a quick breath which might have been one of relief. "No, nobody."

"I gathered from what you said at the inquest that you are convinced Mr. Moreton did not take his own life?"

"He couldn't have done such a thing." She spoke in a hard determined way, with none of the feeling she had shown at the inquest.

"He had an enemy then, Miss Nixie?"

"He must have had," she said in the same hard way.

"But you do not know who?"

She was silent.

"It may be of tremendous importance to your interests to elucidate that matter," Parker persisted. "I am not questioning out of mere curiosity."

"I am not certain of anything," she finally answered. "I don't want to say any more."

"Even the statement of a suspicion would help me," Parker suggested.

She shook her head.

"Well, I won't press you—we'll drop that matter," Parker said. "But there's one more question: who is Harry Holt, Miss Allen? In spite of your testimony, I can't help feeling that you know more about him than any one else, and I ask because I feel certain that he is going to be drawn into the future complications which I am trying my best to avoid."

Her voice could not have been more icy. "I told at the inquest all I have to say about Holt. . . . What do you mean when you say he may be drawn into future complications? What do you mean by

future complications?" She raised her cloudy green-gray eyes to his; they were too opaque to be even questioning.

Parker was tempted to retort that, "The cleverest way to avoid questions is to question." He realized that, except by actual brutality, he was quite incapable of breaking down her guard; he was wasting his time. In twenty-four hours she might see urgent reasons for altering her attitude.

He partly answered her question: "I think the entire matter of Mr. Moreton's death is almost certain to be reopened, Miss Nixie."

She surprised him. "I am sure it will be."

"In that case, Holt will have to appear, and I should regret that."

Nixie surprised him again. "Yes, I suppose he will have to appear. . . . Is that what you mean by 'future complications'?"

"I am terribly afraid Holt may be accused of murder," Parker answered briefly. She had kept her own secrets and had become the questioner—let her have a bit of the truth.

Her eyes left his and settled upon the landscape framed by the window. "In that case, I would be accused too, for I was with him," she said quietly.

"Of all the damned *coolness*!" was Parker's mental comment. He remembered Jowett's reluctant admiration when he said, "She's got grit, hard grain in her, that girl, and *will*! Will enough to do anything!"

She certainly possessed "grit" and "will" and several other qualities that made for "coolness." But it was evident that her steadily enunciated statement cost her something, for her forehead, beneath her curls, had grown moist and tiny beads of perspiration peppered her upper lip.

"That is a probability we must try to avoid," Parker said.

Nixie did not ask, "How can we avoid it?" She said none of the things Parker thought it would be natural for her to say. "It would be a great—pity," she answered with a quiver of undeniably genuine feeling. "A very great—pity—" she added slowly and softly. Her voice was sweet when robbed of coldness and steadiness.

Parker was as completely puzzled as he had ever been in his life. What *was* going on beneath those childish curls of hers? What was she anyway? He had come determined to elucidate Nixola Allen, and it seemed that he was going to leave in a doubly bemazed condition. But with Everitt Parker puzzlement bred a patience and determination that not even a secret angry anxiety could stir. "Grit" and "will" and distrust and native secretiveness would break—in time. Both he and she—and Holt—were facing an avalanche of *difficulties*.

Parker's practical brain had already told him that he might as well leave her alone. "Yes, it would be a 'pity,'" he said with extreme dryness. "But I must

go. If for any reason you should need me, you will find my office number in the telephone book—and also my residence number, for I shall continue to stay at the ——— Hotel." Parker's voice was super-dry when he named the hotel where they had both spent an unforgetable night.

His abrupt move startled Nixie. She rose hastily and the keys in her lap which she had forgotten fell and scattered upon the floor. Parker gathered them up and returned them to her, and for a brief moment his eyes met hers. "Keys to every room in the house," he remarked lightly. "You must be bent on a house-breaking expedition."

His voice was quite under his control, but combined irritation, curiosity and anxiety barbed his always keen glance. Her opaquely wide look dropped beneath his and she made no answer. She received the keys in her cupped hands, the color flaming in her cheeks.

Parker strode away, and it was his irritation which made him pause at the study door and try it, and without any effort to conceal his rattling of the knob. The door was securely locked, and he went on down the stairs to the lower passageway. But there he stopped. He had left something unsaid, and that something was important. His irritation urged him not to return, but it was a rare thing for Parker to allow anger to interfere with what he considered his legal duty.

He climbed the stairs again and gained the upper passage, then halted and listened, for sounds that were

painfully familiar had reached his ear. He considered a moment, then went on to the boxed stairway and stood, looking down on Nixie.

She lay on the steps, her face buried in her folded arms, convulsed by an agony of weeping. She was twisting about in her misery, clutching at the carpet on the steps, gripping the step itself with a force Parker could well imagine, for there was a queer throb in his wrist reminding him of her steel fingers. She had broken down, surrendered to a passion of grief or regret, or terror—probably to all three emotions. Her tumbled curls and small body and utter abandonment made her appear a frantically distressed child. This was the way in which she had wept that hot night at the hotel, gasping sobs which set Parker's nerves to twitching.

He stood over her for a time, his jaws hard-set, his face particularly expressionless. Then he sat down beside her and put his hand on her heaving shoulder; under its thin covering it was burning hot. "Miss Nixie?" he said.

He startled her terribly, for she cried out, then half rose and shrank away from him. "Leave me—alone! . . . Go away—" she gasped.

"I'm not going away," Parker said quietly. "You're going to tell me just what the trouble is, and I'm going to help you."

She did not answer for a time, for she was evidently using all the strength she possessed to gain control of

herself; she shivered and shook and choked in her violent effort. "There—isn't anything—you can do—for me—" she said finally, and then with passionate vehemence, "If only I'd never been born!" She sat up and thrust back her fallen hair. "I tell myself not to cry—whatever I do, I mustn't hurt myself—I have no *will*!" Her face was congested and swollen; she set her teeth on her under lip trying to steady it. "I think you want to do the best you can—" she muttered.

"I want to be trusted. . . . And I'm not so sure that there is nothing I can do for you. Try me. I'm a pretty good legal brain—at your service."

Nixie hid her face against her knees, relaxed into long-drawn breathing, and Parker looked down at her doubled up and very childlike position. She was gathering self-control and trying to think. He watched the redness fade from the nape of her neck, where the little curls clustered, watched her skin become dusky-white. She sat very still for a time.

Then she suddenly straightened. "Mr. Parker, it isn't all just property Mr. Moreton has left me, is it? Some of it is ready money, isn't it?"

Parker was very completely surprised by the question, but he had decided that Nixola Allen was, for the present at least, quite beyond his comprehension; if humored, she might reveal herself sufficiently for him to draw some sort of conclusions regarding her. At present he was at sea, entirely so. . . . Under the circumstances, what a question for her to ask!

He answered kindly enough. "Yes, he has left you money. . . . Why, do you need money?"

Her tear-rimmed eyes brightened. "A sum I could have at once?"

"Why—I think you ought to be allowed enough to live on, even in case of—court proceedings." It was the nearest approach Parker dared make to the danger in which she stood; too plain a reference, and she might withdraw into her granite fastness. She had relaxed into apparently perfect naturalness; she looked both doubtful and eager, the first time he had seen her look really girlish.

"Could I have the use of a thousand dollars, at once, to-morrow—if I wanted it?"

Parker did some rapid thinking: Holt in need of money to make a get-a-way? Possibly Nixie herself meditating flight? "Do you want to make a present of it to some one—or run away with it yourself?" he asked smilingly.

"No, no! . . . I want to do something with it—for Mr. Moreton—and I have only a hundred dollars, from presents he made me."

Parker had reached a decision. "I could not possibly let you have it from the estate, no one could, but I can loan you a thousand, Miss Nixie."

"To-morrow?"

"I can give you a check now, if you want it," and his hand went to his pocket.

"And you'd be *sure* to get it back from the estate—a

loan made me in that way? You'd get it—no matter what happened to me?" she asked earnestly.

Parker had brought forth his check-book. "I think it can be arranged. . . . Shall I write it?"

Nixie put her hand on his arm. "No—wait a minute. . . . Let me think!" She stared blankly at the open window and Parker watched her in absorbed interest. Eagerness and relief had wiped the swollen look from her face; her color had risen and her ripe upper lip quivered; she was tense with thought. Parker paid her beauty a tribute. Then he looked at the hand on his arm; she was quite unconscious that it remained there; certainly at this moment she was genuine.

She looked up at him, finally, a half-cloudy, half-brilliant gaze. "No, it will be better for you to bring it to me to-morrow, when you come with the will. I couldn't get a check cashed to-morrow—I must stay here. . . . I will have a receipt all written and ready for you," she added practically, and she took her hand from his arm.

"Very well, Miss Nixie, you may count on me." Parker returned his check-book to his pocket and rose. He was reflecting that she was certainly not backward in calling upon him for help—and her need would grow with time. . . . But he had returned to voice a warning:

"I came back to say something which is important," he said with decision. "Miss Nixie, you may be

tempted to escape from all this, leave Moreton House, if nothing else. Don't do it. Take a lawyer's word for it, that you would be doing a suicidal thing for yourself—and Holt. . . . . And, incidentally, for myself."

Nixie stood up and, with the aid of the step and her upflung head, she looked tall. "Leave Moreton House! . . . Moreton House is *my home* and here I *stay!*" she said with tensity.

"Right you are!" Parker said. Her answer had quieted one of his fears.

He turned to go, but Nixie held out her hand. "Thank you for lending me the money," she said somewhat royally and yet with sweetness.

Parker shook hands with her and departed. His cynicism was assuring him that he had parted rather easily with a thousand dollars. His experience, his instinct, rather, told him with greater decision that he had emerged from that supplementary interview with a point gained. At least, he was carrying away with him one definite conclusion regarding Nixola Allen.

XXI

WIDOW'S WEEDS

WHEN Parker re-entered the house by way of the veranda and started up-stairs to his room, he was stopped by Burke. "Mrs. Moreton wishes to see you, sir. I have been watching for you to come in."

There was both questioning and anxiety in the little butler's respectful manner. His intelligent blue eyes searched Parker's face keenly and at the same time with deference. Parker guessed that Burke had known perfectly well that he had been with Nixie, and also that he was very anxious over the result of the interview; that probably Nixie was almost as much of an enigma to Burke as she was to Parker himself. If Burke was devoted to Nixie, he would naturally be poignantly fearful of the same "complications" Parker feared. Parker was convinced that Burke knew far more about Moreton's affairs, business and otherwise, than any one suspected.

It occurred to Parker that Burke might be willing to talk, and he decided to test him. "I'll see Mrs. Moreton presently," Parker answered. "I wish I could have a talk with you first, Burke."

Burke's look grew veiled. "Yes, sir—certainly, sir,"

he said cautiously. "But it will 'ardly be possible just now, sir, for I have been ordered to remain here in the 'all. . . . There has been a reporter out, talking with Doctor Levene. The doctor asked for you, sir, but you couldn't be found."

Parker could not determine whether Burke was reluctant or merely cautious. "Perhaps you can bring me some lunch, in my room—later on," he suggested. "I shall see Mrs. Moreton, then I must get back to town."

"Your lunch will be sent up. I shall bring it up myself, sir—if possible," Burke answered in the same veiled way. "Mrs. Moreton wished you to come directly to her apartment, opposite to Mr. Moreton's, sir."

Parker nodded and went on up-stairs, still uncertain as to Burke. The man was terribly anxious, that was evident; he looked harassed and ten years older than the rosy-faced man who, the day before, had carried Parker's bag into Moreton House. But was he prepared to rid himself of the knowledge Parker was certain he possessed? If he was, he would find a means. It rested now with Burke himself; certainly he could not be coerced.

Parker was ushered into Mrs. Moreton's apartment by her maid, who was not too much oppressed by the family tragedy to regard the family lawyer with intense interest. Mrs. Moreton's pink and gold boudoir was so shaded that it was almost dim, and Mrs. More-

ton, her hair banded with black, swathed in a black negligee and braced upon the couch by many pillows, completed the general effect of illness and mourning. The tabouret at her knee supported the bottle of smelling-salts and the black-edged handkerchief.

Parker decided that Driscoll was quite right, a straining after effect was one of Mrs. Moreton's characteristics, and these pronounced appurtenances of mourning were quite a natural self-expression. Nevertheless, he sensed in her a certain relief, amounting almost to satisfaction. She had worn that air ever since she had delivered her testimony against Nixie. She still looked like one who had experienced a severe shock, but she did not appear to be grief-stricken or overwhelmed. She gave Parker her thin hand, then motioned him to the chair beside her.

Parker avoided the usual expressions of sympathy. "I wish you were feeling less ill, Mrs. Moreton."

"I am really too ill to see any one," she answered, "but there is something I must ask you about. . . . Mary, I will ring when I want you."

The maid noiselessly withdrew and they were left together. Mrs. Moreton then lifted the smelling-salts, and there was silence for a moment. She spoke then with somewhat more vigor. "There is no need of my saying how horrified I have been, or of apologizing for my nerves, or of talking of the fearful thing which has happened. I feel more myself now and there are things which must be attended to."

"You are quite right not to dwell upon what has occurred," Parker agreed.

"Yes, Doctor Levene has impressed on me the danger of giving way again, as I did last night. He has begged me to think of practical things. . . . What we would have done without him, I don't know! I feel that I really owe my reason to him."

"It was very fortunate that there was a physician here," Parker said sympathetically. To himself he said, "Humph!"

"I am very glad he was here. And you, I know, will want to help me about business matters. I am ignorant about such things, for Mr. Moreton always shielded me from business annoyances. But I have had other troubles, Mr. Parker, and my nerves have gone to pieces as a result. In addition to everything else, I lost my mother two years ago, and again I am in black." She touched her gown and her eyes filled with tears. "This last year has been simply terrible," she added with quivering lips.

"I judge so—from what you said at the inquest," Parker answered. "But you are looking very much better now, Mrs. Moreton . . . and you are beautiful in black—you are so fair."

It was curiosity as well as the certainty that he would not be rebuked which prompted Parker to venture upon Doctor Levene's methods, as he had observed them. Her passion for admiration was a little

pathetic; Nixie's vivid beauty must indeed have been a thorn in her side.

Mrs. Moreton did not look displeased. She dried her eyes with the black-edged handkerchief, drew a quivering breath, then braced herself. "I meant not to talk of my troubles," she said. "What I wanted to talk about was the funeral arrangements. Mr. Moreton told me a long time ago that he had arranged in his will for cremation—I know that he advised it in my mother's case. . . . Do you know about his will—where it is and just what were his wishes in this matter?"

"Yes, I do," Parker answered. "The will is deposited with the Saftey Trust Company. Mr. Moreton made a will quite recently, and attached to it he left definite instructions: after due certification of death, he wished his body to be cremated and the ashes placed in the family vault. Mr. Moreton made his will only a few days ago."

"Oh—" she said blankly. Then, after a pause, "I suppose he has left other instructions about which I know nothing? I ought to know what they are—or I may be doing something or other he would not wish. . . . I knew about the will he made ten years ago—I didn't know he had made another." The color came in her cheeks and her nervous hands began to twitch.

"Mr. Moreton made three wills, Mrs. Moreton, one eighteen years ago, the next, ten years ago, and an-

other only this last week. The first two wills he destroyed in my presence and the presence of a member of the Safety Trust Company. This last will provides that directly after the funeral it shall be read in the presence of the family."

Parker saw in her widened eyes the desire to question further, restrained by her fear of showing too much eagerness. "I see," she said hastily, and her color deepened. "I suppose you drew this new will?"

Parker sensed her instant antagonism. Before her husband's death, he had meant nothing to her, her husband's lawyer and unconnected with her social set. Since her husband's death, he had gained somewhat in importance, some one whose services she intended to retain, but only so long as he pleased her. Not until this moment had it occurred to her that he was vitally connected with her property interests and probably the custodian of her husband's wishes and intentions, of which she knew practically nothing.

"Yes, I drew the will," he said quietly. "I have attended to all such matters for Mr. Moreton for the last six years. . . . I feel, Mrs. Moreton, that we should follow Mr. Moreton's wishes in every respect. Aside from the instructions concerning the disposal of his remains, I know of no point that we need to consider until after the will is read."

"Yes, of course," she said nervously and at the same time with an edge to her words. "You know all about his wishes—of course."

"Being in my position, I do of course know a good deal about his wishes," Parker returned equably, "and, knowing as much as I do, there is something I want to say: Mr. Moreton's death is a sensationally tragic thing, Mrs. Moreton, and, in any case, there will be public comment. I feel very strongly that we should do nothing to arouse a still greater stir. We must consider the social position of the family—your social position. Innuendoes, scandal, anything of that sort will reflect upon your social position, for it will be an attack upon the name you bear. . . . You have asked me to advise you, and I am doing so to the best of my ability; let us subordinate private animosities, and endeavor to carry out Mr. Moreton's wishes with the least stir possible, always bearing in mind that Mr. Moreton built his fortune and that it was his right to dispose of it in lawful fashion. . . . I speak from my not inconsiderable legal experience, Mrs. Moreton, when I advise you that you will further both your personal and family interests by avoiding controversy, and above all, public comment and *scandal.*" He ended with no little sternness.

She was sitting tense now, without the support of pillows. "Yes, yes," she agreed hurriedly. "Of course I don't want talk and comment. But I had to say what I did at the inquest—I had to tell the truth. I certainly don't want that matter to go any further, but I don't see what else I was to do, Mr. Parker? Mr. Moreton

was certainly not himself, to do what he did, and I am convinced that he has not been himself for some time because of—of the state of mind he was in." She was evidently frightened, but she was also defiant.

Parker's private opinion was, that, for a nervous uncontrolled woman, she had testified with greater reserve than might have been expected. He guessed that she had been advised; Doctor Levene had probably urged upon her the unwisdom of a family exposé. She was seething, that was evident, but she was also afraid and she was thinking rapidly and, Parker judged, dubiously concerning the possible contents of the will. "You could, of course, state only what you believed to be true," Parker agreed.

"Did Mr. Moreton make you an executor?" she asked abruptly.

"Yes, together with the Safety Trust Company."

Her lips parted, then closed on some question.

Parker did not want to be questioned. "Is there anything else I can do for you, Mrs. Moreton, or can I do anything for you in the city? . . . I am a little hurried, for I want to get the next train. . . . I understand that the funeral will be in the morning, and, in that case, I shall have to bring the will out, for according to its provisions, it must be read by myself directly after the funeral and in the presence of only the immediate family, yourself, Driscoll Moreton, your sister, Mrs. Burnside, of Philadelphia, and Miss

Allen. I reached Mrs. Burnside by long distance last night."

The flush in Mrs. Moreton's cheeks had deepened to a hot red. "Everything seems to have been carefully arranged!" she flashed in bitter sarcasm.

Parker looked at her in a surprise which was either well assumed or quite natural. "Everything would have to be carefully arranged in the settlement of an estate as valuable as Mr. Moreton's. . . . I think Mr. Moreton's will is as carefully thought out and as concise a legal document as I have ever seen, and small praise due me, who drew it up, for Mr. Moreton had so thoughtfully weighed and considered every point before he called upon me for merely the legal phraseology."

"I should scarcely call either my sister or Miss Allen members of the family," she said hotly. "I have not seen my sister for over ten years, and Miss Allen is certainly not related to us in any way."

"I have merely stated a provision of the will," Parker returned equably.

"Yes, of course," Mrs. Moreton said with less heat. But she breathed quickly and her hands clenched and unclenched.

"Then if there is nothing further, Mrs. Moreton, I shall go and pack my bag," Parker said in the same mild way. "Should you wish to communicate with me before to-morrow, I can be reached by telephone."

Mrs. Moreton was evidently trying hard to control her anger. "I do not think of anything—at present. Doctor Levene is very kindly attending to the funeral arrangements for me—he has spent part of the morning telephoning to the right people. . . . I hope you will come to the funeral," she added with an attempt at graciousness.

Parker shook his head. "Thank you, Mrs. Moreton, I appreciate being asked, but your arrangements better stand just as they are. If you will tell me the hour, I shall time my coming."

"The services will be at ten o'clock, just a short service by the rector at Ford's Landing. I have taken an especial interest in that little church, and the rector is attached to me." She had regained much of her usual manner, but only after great effort; beneath the surface she was still hotly angry, and the chilly hand she offered him was not accompanied by even a glance; he might regard himself as in utter disgrace.

Parker bowed over her hand and withdrew. When the door had closed on the pink and gold of her boudoir, he smiled slightly and shrugged. Then his face settled into hard lines. He looked particularly grim when a footman and not Burke brought him his lunch, a quiet-faced man of nearly middle age who had certainly not been among the servants in the study that morning. He served Parker with the air of a finished waiter; he was evidently far more intelligent than the

footman who had been present at dinner the night before.

"Have you just been taken on?" Parker asked.

"Yes, sir—in the footman's place, sir."

Apparently the man was an American and Parker glanced him over keenly. "The footman's gone then?"

"He and the butler had some words, sir, and he was discharged. . . . I have been working at The Inn, at Ford's Landing. Burke knew me and gave me a chance at this place."

"I see," Parker said meaningly, but the man returned his look in a merely surprised way.

"Burke has known me some time, sir, so he knows I'm capable—I waited in private before I went to The Inn," the man protested, evidently puzzled by Parker's manner.

"Oh, that's all right," Parker said as he went out, "Burke's a good judge of capability."

XXII

THE DOCTOR'S THEORY

TO Parker's surprise and satisfaction Doctor Levene joined him at the front door. Parker wanted a talk with the doctor. "Bound for the city too?" he asked.

"Yes. I think Mrs. Moreton is well enough to be left now—there is really no reason for my remaining. . . . I'm glad to get away, Parker—I'm about done," he added in an undertone.

He looked it; there were dark circles about his eyes and his skin lacked color. "It's been a bad twenty-four hours," he continued. "I have never been able to stand a prolonged nervous strain, and I have had such a really affectionate interest in the Moretons. The whole thing has been simply dreadful!"

He talked and gestured like a nervous woman, and Parker understood why Driscoll's pronounced masculinity was repelled by Doctor Levene and why Moreton had mentioned him with a touch of contempt. Parker himself felt satirically inclined toward the man, and yet he was forced to grant that the doctor had borne himself very well, had done his duty by his patient

and had endeavored to be helpful to every one. Doctor Levene was pronouncedly a New York product of a certain order, he was not responsible for his dapperness and feminine affectations. He had his place and part in the social structure of the great cosmopolitan city; he had *made* a place for himself, no easy thing to do in a city of ravenous competition, and Parker respected accomplishment. He did not feel drawn to the man, the majority of men would not be attracted by him, which was probably the doctor's misfortune and not his fault.

Parker nodded an agreement to the doctor's remarks, for the presence of the chauffeur made intimate conversation inadvisable. The head-gardener had evidently secured a man to take Holt's place, a capable-looking, youngish man, who handled the car well. They had barely time in which to get the train, and there were some steep slopes and sharp turns on the way to the station. Parker noticed that the man drove well; he evidently knew his business.

It was a sparsely passengered train, for there were only a few who were bound for the city at three o'clock on a Sunday afternoon. Parker chose a seat as distant as possible from any passenger, and Doctor Levene settled himself beside him with a sigh. "I need sleep," he said. "I haven't closed my eyes for twenty-four hours. . . . I doubt whether I could sleep, though—I can't get all this horrible business out of my mind."

"Mrs. Moreton told me you had been negotiating with the undertakers this morning, no very enlivening occupation," Parker answered. "What firm did you secure?"

"Eberbaugh and Harris." Doctor Levene made a gesture of despair. "Poor Mrs. Moreton and her nerves! I've been begging her to act sensibly. . . . Parker, you may be thankful that you deal mostly with men. I'm so surfeited with women's nerves that I'm fairly jumpy myself! . . . You see, from the beginning of my practice, I have worked on the theory that in every woman—and man also—more particularly the highly civilized product, there lies a more or less active abnormality. It's apt to crop out in women between forty and fifty. I owe my success in the treatment of women to this theory of mine. I search for the either semi-latent or pretty fully developed abnormality, and work from that basis."

Parker regarded him thoughtfully. "You're a student of the abnormal, then, Doctor?"

"I have to be." Doctor Levene smiled. "Now I dare say that even as apparently perfectly normal a man as yourself possesses a tiny morbid streak which may be either recognized or unrecognized by yourself. . . . Mr. Moreton was apparently as wholesome a man as ever existed, but witness the outcome!"

Parker made a mental comment as to what might be the doctor's secret abnormality, but he was not particularly interested in Doctor Levene's make-up.

The doctor had evidently mentioned Moreton with a purpose, and that was a matter in which Parker was interested. "An unexpected denouement certainly —how do you explain it?" he asked.

Doctor Levene hesitated. "We're talking confidentially, of course?"

"Certainly."

"A mad infatuation of a man of over fifty for a young girl!" Levene stated with decision. "It's not the first case of the kind I've known. I've not had more than a few moments' doubt of the cause since the moment I was summoned to the study. . . . You see, Parker, I've been pretty intimately connected with the family for more than two years and I've seen the thing grow. And Mrs. Moreton's distraction over it did not help matters. Heavens! these family tragedies a physician, particularly a physician who has a number of middle-aged women patients, walks in on and can't remedy!" He spoke with a sort of half-indignant, half-sad disgust.

"You have had far better opportunities for judging than I have," Parker returned, "but why this sudden outcome in Moreton's case?"

"Well, I have my theory."

"I'd like to hear it, Levene—I consider you well fitted to judge." The touch of deference in Parker's manner was flattering.

"I think it was the result of a sudden revelation."

Parker considered a moment. "I don't just get that."

"I believe that for some time, in moments of exasperation or excitement or realization of the hopelessness of any solution for a domestic situation such as his, Mr. Moreton considered suicide. Mrs. Moreton told us that he frequently said his life wasn't worth living, and I think the culmination was reached when he suddenly discovered that Miss Allen favored some one else. Mr. Moreton was—well, certainly not his usual self at dinner last night, and he had just come up from a conversation with Miss Allen at the lakeside. If, after what may have been an upsetting talk with her, he received a final blow, some convincing proof that Miss Allen was playing double, for instance, the 'denouement,' as you expressed it, would be a possible thing, wouldn't it?"

"Quite possible," Parker agreed. "You have certainly evolved an interesting theory."

"It's the only reasonable explanation I have been able to make to myself," Levene said with conviction, "and, as you say, I have had unusual opportunities for judging."

"You noticed Moreton's expression?" Parker said thoughtfully. "How do you explain that?"

"Of course I noticed his expression, but wouldn't he be suddenly and violently enraged if he had made such a discovery? Quite insane for the moment? He loved that girl beyond anything, Parker—believe me, *I* know!"

"But who is the man Miss Allen would 'favor,' as you put it?" Parker asked with interest.

Doctor Levene hesitated. "I don't like to say a thing that rests mostly on surmise."

"But we have been considering merely a theory—a pretty reasonable and interesting theory, it appears to me. Let us go on with it."

"Well, there are only two possible men, Driscoll Moreton and Harry Holt, the chauffeur. Driscoll Moreton has been in love with Miss Allen for a long time, pretty desperately so, but, from small signs, I think there has been some sort of an affair between Miss Allen and Holt, and I'm convinced that the discovery of such a thing would have been quite enough to drive Mr. Moreton mad. . . . You see, Parker, Nixola Allen really belongs in the chauffeur's class —Mrs. Moreton told me long ago of the sort of conditions from which they took her—what could you expect of her? And the chauffeur was exactly the type to appeal to her—he has a wonderful body, that man, a physically perfect specimen, in spite of his rough features. And, if I'm any judge of sex indications, she's a thoroughly fiery sort—awfully secretive and alluring, too." The doctor expressed himself earnestly.

"And she is, of course, endowed with an 'abnormality?' " Parker said, with a smile.

"You don't think much of my theory, then?" Levene

said with a boyishly crestfallen air which was disarming. "Of course I'm not a lawyer and not a bit keen, but it did seem to me a reasonable explanation for Mr. Moreton's act."

"It is a reasonable explanation; it's a clever and quite a convincing theory with a good deal of fact to recommend it," Parker declared, "and I'm glad you detailed it to me. . . . But the suspicion of foul play has also occurred to you, hasn't it? What do you think of that possibility?"

"Certainly it occurred to me," Levene said decidedly. "I imagine there has not been a person in Moreton House to whom it hasn't occurred. I felt certain it wasn't murder, and yet, Parker, the possibility stuck to me until I made that last examination. I worried around in my mind for the motive any one would have to do such a desperate and dangerous thing and I couldn't make it out. I've held pretty steadily to my conviction, for I knew so well the unhappy state of things in that household. And I knew, you see, from what Mrs. Moreton had told me from time to time, that Mr. Moreton felt pretty desperate. . . . I don't like to denounce any one, but certainly that girl has a good deal to answer for."

Parker said nothing.

"It's been a desperate state of things in that household," the doctor continued with a good deal of feeling, "but I *couldn't* tell all I knew at the inquest—Mrs. Moreton said quite enough, I think. . . .

And, too, I simply couldn't afford to be too much mixed up in the thing. As it is, I'll be driven nearly wild by the curiosity of my patients." He looked distressed and he sighed.

Parker remembered Driscoll's statement: "He's been suffering agonies at the thought that his happenso connection with this business might hurt his position." And Parker also remembered Driscoll's admission: "There are some pretty decent things about Levene. . . ." The man was an odd mixture, at one moment astute and convincing, the next moment almost amusingly womanish and superficial. But Parker liked him better than he had in the beginning. Such as he was, he appeared to be sincere.

While Doctor Levene went on to name some of his noteworthy patients who would be "simply horrified" by the whole affair, Parker's thoughts circled about the doctor's theory; it would be curious if he had hit upon a water-tight explanation—something which could be utilized in case of need.

They parted at the station and Doctor Levene said earnestly, "Of course I've talked very freely to you, but the one thing I want is for all this matter to quiet down—what good can it do Mrs. Moreton to stir around about it? Only the satisfaction of giving Miss Allen a bad name, and, after all, she's just a very young girl. I have urged Mrs. Moreton to consider herself above it all, and to let it pass. . . . But there's no telling with a woman in Mrs. Moreton's

wrought-up condition, and if I can do anything at all to help you keep things quiet, and of course that's what you want, why call on me. I wish, anyway, that you'd dine with me some evening soon—you can get me at my office."

It had already occurred to Parker that the doctor might be exceedingly useful. He returned with cordiality Levene's invitation to dine with him: "I'll do that, and with pleasure. . . . Drop in at my hotel and dine with me, sometime this week, Levene."

When he reached his hotel, Parker telephoned to Driscoll Moreton. "You know who this is—how is it going?"

"Orders from headquarters—only the barest skeleton of a story allowed," Driscoll returned. "The lid's on—tight."

"I guessed as much. Come and have dinner with me to-night, Driscoll—seven o'clock."

XXIII

IT'S WOMAN AGAINST WOMAN

MOMENTS of complete silence followed the reading of the will.

Parker folded the document and the papers accompanying it, apparently quite oblivious of the four silent people before him, but in reality vividly conscious of them and of the tense silence, for, robbed of legal phraseology, Mathew Moreton had disposed of his fortune as follows:

To his nephew, Driscoll Moreton, he had bequeathed two hundred thousand dollars.

To his sister-in-law, Mrs. Burnside, forty thousand dollars, and to each of her three sons, all of whom were serving in the army, the sum of twenty thousand dollars.

To the butler, Arthur Burke, twenty thousand dollars.

To the widow of one of the head-gardener's assistants, five thousand dollars. (This assistant had enlisted immediately upon America's declaration of war and had lost his life on a torpedoed troop-ship. He had left a widow and two children.)

To the mother of the young man who for several years had acted as Moreton's secretary and had forfeited a lucrative salary to enter the army, the sum of five thousand dollars. (She was a widow, elderly and in large part dependent upon her son, but had urged him to enlist.)

To each of the household servants who had served the family for more than five years the sum of five hundred dollars.

To various charities, war charities in particular, in aggregate, the sum of two million dollars.

To Lilian Moreton, his wife, the widow's portion required by the laws of the state, and, in addition, the New York City family residence in East Sixty-sixth Street.

And finally, in Moreton's own words: "To my ward, known as Nixola Allen, and regarded by me as my beloved daughter, I give, devise, and bequeath all the rest and residue of my property, real, personal and mixed, with the request that her husband, should she marry, shall take the name of Moreton and be known by that name, and that her children, should she have issue, shall bear the name of Moreton." From the carefully annotated list of Mathew Moreton's possessions, which accompanied the will, it was apparent that Nixola Allen was heir to the bulk of the Moreton estate, some fifteen million dollars; and she became sole mistress of Moreton House.

The instructions, explanations, and list of posses-

sions which accompanied the will made a considerable document, though a model of clearness. Regarding Driscoll, Moreton said, "I gladly give to my nephew, Driscoll Moreton, the sum named in my will and without restrictions, feeling that he will be moved thereby to make a useful and competent man of himself, and will, first of all, give himself to the service of his country. I have always had faith in him."

Of Mrs. Burnside, Moreton said: "I leave to Mrs. Burnside the sum I have named because of my very deep respect for her. She has had small means, she was early left a widow, and yet she has reared three clean manly boys and has offered them to the service of their country. I remove my hat at the thought of such women—I wish that every man of wealth would do his bit toward smoothing the path of such mothers."

And of Nixie, Moreton said: "Nixola Allen has been to me a loving and faithful daughter, the comfort of my middle-age. Being childless, I leave to her the bulk of my estate, not only by reason of my affectionate regard for her, but because I know that she will, in as much as is humanly possible, apply my fortune to the aims and ends which I myself have at heart. She knows what they are. She has youth, strength, and great good sense. She also has before her many child-bearing years, and through her I hope to assure the continuance of the Moreton name."

Parker had read the will and the accompanying document in a clear incisive voice, and he now folded

the papers and secured them with an elastic, his hands steady, his face utterly impassive.

Then he looked up, squared his shoulders and ran his resolute eye over the four silent people. "I have read you Mathew Moreton's last will and testament, as directed by him," he said.

Then the thing he had foreseen happened. Mrs. Moreton rose and came to the table and placed a clenched hand upon it; she was flushed to scarlet, quivering from head to foot, and her eyes were widely dilated. "And I notify you that I shall contest that so-called *will!* It is either a forgery, or it was the work of a man who wasn't in his right mind and was influenced to make an unjust disposition of his property!"

Parker met her blazing eyes steadily. "You are, of course, free to contest, Mrs. Moreton, but I warn you that the allegations you have made are serious."

His equable tones appeared to irritate her beyond endurance. "I have grounds for my allegations!" she said violently. "You and Driscoll Moreton had your reasons for influencing Mr. Moreton, and *she,* that girl"—Mrs. Moreton whirled and pointed a shaking finger at Nixie—"she's been at the bottom of the whole thing, she is nothing but a—"

Driscoll had sprung to his feet. "Be careful what you say, Aunt Lilian!" he interrupted warningly. He had grown dead white.

Mrs. Burnside, a tall woman plainly gowned and with a care-worn face, very evidently several years

her sister's senior, had reached Mrs. Moreton's side. "Lilian! Control yourself!" she begged. "You don't know what you say when you are angry!"

But Mrs. Moreton flung off her sister's hand and faced them all, so beside herself that her high voice was stringy. "You drunken beast!" she said to Driscoll. "You think you'll walk off with two hundred thousand and a high-priced lawyer to help you do it! But you won't! And I'll say what I please now to that *thing!*" she screamed, her finger still pointing at Nixie. "For three years she has been working for just this, inveigling and scheming and tempting, drawing an impressionable old man into her net, making him mad over her! You're just as much a murderess as if you'd strangled him with your steel fingers—perhaps you did strangle him and poison him as Powell's murderer did—you're capable of it. . . . I took you out of the dirt and I'll send you back to it, Nixola Allen! I'll—" She stopped because her voice had broken in two, not because words had failed. Flung to her full height, her fair head a-quiver, she burned and gasped for breath.

Mrs. Burnside, crimson and aghast, stood where her sister's passionate movement had thrust her, against the table. Just what Driscoll had meant to do he himself probably did not know, he had moved as if by some means to silence that high, uneven voice. But Parker had stopped him, gripped his arm and held him. "Keep still, Driscoll!" he half whispered. "Let her talk!"

Nixie had said nothing. When Mrs. Moreton had first whirled on her, she had risen slowly from her chair, her eyes still wide and vague, the look of utter absorption, which had grown upon her during the reading of the will, and which, at its conclusion, made her appear spell-bound. She had risen and had simply looked at Mrs. Moreton. And after the flood of Mrs. Moreton's rage and scorn had poured over her she still continued to look at her, though no longer vaguely, for the blood had surged into her face and her eyes were blazing. But she said nothing, simply waited until Mrs. Moreton recaptured her voice and plunged on:

"I'll tell the truth about you, Nixola Allen! You'll be known from one end of the country to the other! I'll prove in open court exactly what you were to my husband, you ——!"

Even Parker caught his breath at the vividly ugly accusation. And Nixie gasped, the thing had struck her in the face. But she did not go down before it; she stiffened and paled and grew taller. Then, suddenly, and swiftly, she took the few steps which brought her close to her accuser. The elder woman was much taller, the girl looked up at her; it was her ringingly clear voice and dauntless eyes that made her impressive.

"You poor dupe of clever people!" she said. "Don't you know how hard it is to prove a *lie!*"

And that was all. She turned in the same swift way, walked by them all to the door, opened it and

closed it behind her with decision. Mrs. Moreton looked after her; they all looked after her.

Then Mrs. Moreton turned on the remaining three. "You, Sarah, and your sons, shall not get your hundred thousand which he gave you without a single word to me! . . . And you, Driscoll Moreton, won't have your debts paid by me! . . . Nor *you* your rake-off, Mr. Parker! In less than an hour I'll get the best legal talent in New York to protect me from your machinations!" And she also swept by them and left the room. She was aflame, but it was a purposeful rage, she showed no signs of hysteria.

Of the three who remained, Parker appeared to be the only one possessing presence of mind. He had already lifted the telephone and was calling a number. Mrs. Burnside was ringing her hands and Driscoll was white and shaking with passion.

"Go after her—go at once and let her rage at you!" Parker said to Mrs. Burnside across the telephone. "There's no telling what mad thing she may do unless there's some one for her to expend herself upon. If you can divert her from the telephone, you may save her and all of us from the biggest scandal New York's known for many a day! . . . I'm calling up Doctor Levene—he'll be able to handle her, if any one can." And his sharp, quick conversation with Doctor Levene followed:

"Levene, this is Parker. You're needed out here—Moreton House. . . . Yes, Mrs. Moreton. . . .

Now listen! She's wildly upset over—affairs. As soon as I ring off, call her up. Don't let her talk, understand, nor gather that I've called you, but as soon as you hear her voice you'll know she needs attention, and you tell her you're coming out directly—get a machine if necessary. . . . Yes, yes, she's on the point of doing something—regrettable. Come and advise her—you're the one person who can do it. . . . I'm off now, get her!"

Mrs. Burnside had gone and Driscoll was calmer, but still very white. "Can he stop her?" he asked.

"If any one can."

"Will he do it?"

Parker was consulting his watch and his manner was hurried. "He'll try—you'd think so if you'd heard his voice. I knew he'd not be aching to figure as a star witness in any case of Mrs. Moreton's. I fancy, though, she'll throw him over and go her own way. . . . Now listen, Driscoll—I want to get back to town. Take this envelope and give it to Miss Allen. Search for her till you find her and give it to her. . . . Have a talk with her—it won't do any harm."

Driscoll shrank. "I can't thrust myself on her after —what's just happened. It's you ought to talk to her, Parker—tell her what you told me yesterday, that you mean to stand by her."

Parker's reluctance was decided. "I can't do it. You're a Moreton—it devolves on you. . . . Tell her that I've gone to look after her interests. If she

needs me she must call me, and if I have anything to report I'll call her. . . . Go and do what I tell you —if I can't stop this thing one way, I'll try another."

"It isn't true, Parker—what Aunt Lilian accused her of. It isn't *true!*"

"We're not discussing that," Parker answered sharply. "Nobody's guilty until proved so—it's my business to see that there's no proving in this case."

"But you think Aunt Lilian will go ahead regardless?" Driscoll asked with vivid anxiety. "I'm not thinking of my two hundred thousand—she may have them, if she'll only let Nixie alone!"

"I think she will go ahead, and I think Miss Allen will fight to the last ditch. It's not merely money with either of them, Driscoll—it's woman against woman. . . . You go, now—then hunt me up in town."

XXIV

HIS SUBCONSCIOUS SELF

THE will had been read in the library, and when Driscoll started to find Nixie he encountered Burke, who was moving restlessly about the front hall. He must have seen Nixie when she left the library and he must also have seen Mrs. Moreton's rush through the hall and up the stairs.

Burke was trembling; he looked pitifully old and anxious. "I want Miss Allen; where's she gone?" Driscoll demanded.

Certainly there was no comfort to be drawn from Driscoll's look and manner, and Burke asked hurriedly, "Mr. Driscoll, sir—is it true Mr. Moreton has left everything to Miss Allen, sir?"

Driscoll glared at him. "You overheard, I suppose!" he returned sharply.

"I couldn't help hearing Mrs. Moreton, sir. . . . It was terrible—it makes me forget my place, sir," he said in distressed apology.

"Yes, it's true enough—and there's the devil to pay."

Burke lifted his shaking hands in a gesture of despair. "I've been afraid of it, sir—I've been afraid of

it! Mr. Parker should have advised Mr. Moreton against it—he should indeed! But he didn't understand, of course. . . . But now, is there nothing Mr. Parker can do, sir? If only Mrs. Moreton can be kept from acting at once, sir—that is most important."

"You're for Miss Allen all right, Burke," Driscoll said more kindly. "Just stick to that—she'll need you. Aunt Lilian's gone jealous mad, I think—we'll simply have to do the best we can. . . . Where did Nixie go?"

"To her room, I think, sir. . . . Mr. Driscoll, sir—if Doctor Levene could talk to Mrs. Moreton—that would be best. Doctor Levene will not want trouble, sir—he will 'ave his reasons, sir."

"Parker telephoned him," Driscoll answered. "Parker's in the library, there—go in and talk to him, Burke, I have to see Nixie."

But, as Driscoll went up the stairs and looked back, he saw that Burke had not gone into the library; he was still limping about the hall. "What's he holding off from Parker for?" was Driscoll's mental comment.

To Driscoll's surprise, it was the new footman who, in answer to his knock, opened Nixie's door. And, to his still greater surprise, he saw that Nixie was preparing to go out. She had already donned a different gown and her hat and gloves lay on the dressing-table. When Driscoll stood in the open door, she was arranging her hair, and with an air of haste.

"You, Driscoll? . . . Come in," she said composedly, and to the footman, "That's all, Sanderson—just see that Murray has the car ready." Then she turned and faced Driscoll, her head high, her eyes steady. "Well?"

Driscoll had lost his pallor; under Nixie's cold eyes he grew crimson. "It was Parker sent me, Nixie—he wanted me to give you this," and he held out the envelope. He was thoroughly embarrassed.

She frowned in a puzzled way; then her look cleared. "Oh, I remember. . . . Thank you." Her manner was a dismissal.

"He told me to tell you that he had gone to look after your interests, and that if you needed him you must call him, and if he had anything to report he would call you. He's going back to town."

Nixie had put the envelope in her hand-bag and now she turned to the glass and took up her hat. "Thank you," she repeated, without looking at him.

But Driscoll did not leave. He had known Nixie for some four years and that granite hard look of hers was better understood by him than by Parker. "I'm sorry, Nixie," he said abruptly.

She drew a sharp breath. "It couldn't be helped," she said curtly. "I'm going to town, and I don't want to *talk*." She set her teeth on the last word. She lifted her hands to her hat, hiding her face from him.

"Parker has telephoned to Levene—maybe he can do something with Aunt Lilian," Driscoll said.

Nixie's hands dropped suddenly and she turned to him, her brows lowered. "He's coming out?"

"As quickly as he can get here, Parker said."

She stood for a moment looking at Driscoll in her odd opaque way, as of one thinking intently and not seeing. Then she turned and rang the bell. In an absent way she removed her hat and sat down. "I'll wait —then—" she said slowly. She looked up then at Driscoll's flushed embarrassment. "Wait until I've told Sanderson about the car, then you can say whatever you came to say—I'm not in a hurry now. . . . Sit down, if you like," she added.

Driscoll adjusted his length to one of her small chairs and waited until she had given the footman her orders. "I've decided not to go into town, Sanderson. Tell Murray I'll not want the car. And, Sanderson, tell Burke that Doctor Levene is coming out—he will probably get here in an hour or so and his room must be ready for him, for he may stay the night."

She spoke quite like the mistress of Moreton House, and there was an excessive respect in the footman's answer. "Yes, miss—is there anything else, miss?"

"No—" she said slowly. "Yes, there is, Sanderson: tell Murray that the things he wanted for the car have come—the bolts."

"Yes, Miss Allen," and he backed out of the room.

"You are already taking charge, Nixie," Driscoll remarked.

"Yes," she returned briefly.

"Do you think that's wise?" he asked anxiously. "It'll put Aunt Lilian in a still bigger rage."

Nixie's lips tightened. "Very likely. I'm doing what *he* meant me to do—she doesn't matter."

"But she does matter, Nixie—she matters terribly. *We* know what a hell she made of it for him, but if she does what she's threatened, the public will side with her—it always does—she is the wife and you the interloper. That's the view every one will take. She can do exactly what she said—simply ruin you!"

"What would you advise me to do?" Nixie asked quietly.

"Compromise with her," Driscoll said quickly.

"Is that Mr. Parker's advice?" she returned in the same quiet way.

"No, I don't know what he will advise—he seemed to think that you'd fight, in spite of everything. It's my advice, though. I was thinking on my way up here to you that it would be a deal better for you to take a competence and keep your name clean. Nixie, she'd smudge you all over with dirt—you don't realize to what lengths she'd go. You don't realize what it would be like!"

"I think I do," she said icily, "and also your reason for urging me—where there's doubt there's fear."

He caught his breath as from a blow. "Nixie! . . . Won't you ever forgive me! That was months ago and I was clean beside myself with jealousy! I

didn't really believe it then and ever since I've known I was all wrong. I've crawled round in the dust in my repentance. There's no one on earth who has a bigger faith in you than I have!"

She said nothing, simply looked at him out of cloudy eyes, her face hard-set.

Driscoll leaned toward her, hands out, his face passionate in appeal. "Nixie, you've got to believe me!"

She looked away from his pleading eyes and her lip curled; there was a bit of dust on her skirt and she flicked it off with a scornful gesture.

"You must believe me, Nixie!" Driscoll repeated desperately. He came and knelt beside her, and when she shrank sharply from his nearness he exclaimed, "No, no, I won't touch you—I only want you to look at me and listen to me! . . . Nixie, I love you and I believe in you. I always have—deep down in me—or I wouldn't love you as I do. . . . Can't you understand? I know I'm a poor lot—when the ache gets me, I drink, and then I don't know what I'm about. But about women I think straight. If I didn't adore you, if you weren't just straight and fine in my estimation, do you suppose for a moment that I'd be here on my knees to you now? Why, Nixie, when Aunt Lilian testified as she did, I could have choked her, and just now, when she accused you, I'd have done something desperate then and there if Parker hadn't taken hold of me. Afraid for you! Of course I'm afraid for you!

I love you and it would simply kill me if she gives you a bad name. . . . I couldn't endure—it." He had dropped into hoarseness.

Nixie had been looking into his eyes while he talked; when he lost his voice and stopped she looked down at his bandaged hand. "And what about that night?" she asked.

Driscoll looked at his hand because she was looking at it; his eyes were still misty and his chest heaving. "That—night—?" he repeated vaguely.

"You have a short memory."

For a moment his vague look held. Then his eyes widened and he stared at his hand until his face grew gray. It was some moments before he steadied himself by the back of her chair and got to his feet. He stood for a time, quite silent, looking straight ahead at nothing. "So—it was—I—" he muttered tonelessly. "I've thought possibly—but I couldn't believe it—of myself—" He looked like a man shocked beyond belief; dazed and vague.

Nixie rose from her chair. "Your subconscious self," she said in the same even way. "What's been deep down in you all the time—that's why I haven't wanted to have anything to do with you."

Driscoll's eyes returned from the distance and he looked at her, but in a curious, stricken way. "I should think not," he agreed. "But you didn't show me up at the inquest."

"Show you up at the inquest! Why should I do

that?" she demanded. "I've realized that you didn't know what you were doing—and evidently you haven't remembered anything about it, so I'll never mention it again. Besides, *you're a Moreton*—I always remember that."

"I did not know what I was doing—you really believe that, don't you?" he begged haggardly.

"I've told you—it was the thing which was deep in you—it sprang up without your knowing it. . . . It hurts me to think of it—I don't want to talk of it—I won't talk of it!" She had flushed painfully.

"Of course—I know how you feel—you've got a horror of me. . . . That's how I feel about myself now," he said humbly. "I suppose it was—some subconscious—impulse. . . . I can't grasp it just now —yet—" His brows came together in his effort to think, and he was silent for a few moments. "I'm glad you told me," he said finally. "I'll get the thing straightened out in my mind—by and by . . . and then I'll know what's best to do. . . . But it won't help particularly—in this affair of Aunt Lilian's. . . . What are you going to do, Nixie? Fight, as Parker said?"

She had been looking at him in an intent frowning way, but at his question her brows lifted and her eyes flamed. "Yes, *fight*—and in my own way! Do you suppose I would grant that she's right by crawling to her feet and taking the bone she might throw to me? That's not what *he'd* have me do! . . . Driscoll,

are you going to see Mr. Parker?" She was all tense energy, vivid and determined.

"Yes, I'll see him, of course. . . . He's got to tell me what to do."

"Then tell him just what I've told you, Driscoll."

"I will." He looked down like a man bowed by shame and distress. "It doesn't matter about me—it's you I'm thinking about. . . . I'm sorry, Nixie. . . . I know 'sorry' isn't the word—but I don't know how to put it just now, for my head won't work. . . . I'll have to see Parker—that's the first thing to be done." And he turned to the door. There he paused and looked at her, a gaze that enveloped her; then he opened the door and went slowly out.

XXV

PARKER EXPECTS A VISITOR

IT was one o'clock before Parker was ready for bed. He had come to his up-town apartment at midnight, and, for an hour, he had been busy, opening windows, unpacking his bags, putting fresh sheets on his bed. The place had been closed almost a month and it was hot and stuffy. He had decided suddenly to leave the hotel. He had sent for his housekeeper, but for that night he would have to shift for himself.

Until the place cooled off, it was useless to try to sleep, so Parker sat by the window. It was a hot night, but not the unbearable heat of the last week; there was a breeze from the south and his windows faced south and east, an open view, for his apartment was on the twelfth floor and in an apartment-house which crowned one of the slopes of Park Avenue, a solidly fashionable structure with a deal of white and brass and every possible convenience to recommend it to the extremely well-to-do. Parker was a stockholder, one of the joint owners of the place, and he had altered his apartment to suit his taste; he had thrown two rooms into one to make the spacious com-

bination of living-room, library and drawing-room which at one time it had been his ambition to possess. The dining-room was also to his liking, a large room furnished in old mahogany brought from his father's weather-beaten New England home—there had been some splendid old mahogany in his father's house, but no money with which to keep it polished.

It glistened now beneath the light which Parker had left burning. With the feeling that the place looked ghostly in its coverings of white, Parker had uncovered tables and chairs, a half-hour of unnecessary work; and the same feeling of discomfort had led him to leave the lights burning; hall, library, dining-room, and his bedroom, all were lighted as if for guests, shaded lights expressive of luxury and hospitality.

As he smoked and glanced the place over, conscious meanwhile of the breeze that was cooling his back and lowering the temperature in the rooms, Parker thought, in a secondary way, of the guests he had welcomed there, a brainier set than Mrs. Moreton's, not so conventionally fashionable, people whom Parker had considered worth while, some of them moneyed, some of them not, the women a little too accomplished, Parker thought, lacking in individuality, young in years many of them, but with very little of youth about them. . . . On the twentieth of July, he had given a dinner to those of them who were in or near town. Then he had gone to the mountains himself and, on the fifteenth of August, Moreton had

called him back to draw that will of his. That was Thursday, just five days ago, and in that five days he, and some others, had lived the better part of a lifetime.

Five days! Fifty years, more like! And a tangle over which he had been straining all the gray matter he possessed; how to extricate others—and himself . . . He had returned from reading the will with a definite purpose: he must have it out with Jowett as soon as possible. Then, on his way into town, he had made a discovery which had led him to examine carefully his few belongings at the hotel and as a result he had meditated over a solitary dinner, conscious meantime of another solitary diner ensconced in an alcove of the hotel dining-room.

He had decided then to move to his apartment, but quite openly, for he had had his bags sent on from the hotel and had telephoned to his housekeeper, a conversation any one was at liberty to hear. He had made the necessary arrangements for the forwarding of telephone messages and mail and the address to be given callers. And then he had started out in search of Jowett.

But Jowett either could not or would not be found, and at midnight Parker had sought the marble entrance of his apartment-house. In the course of his search, he had tried to reach Doctor Levene; he had even called up Moreton House and had been told by Burke that Doctor Levene had left Moreton House at nine o'clock that evening. He had ventured one

question, "Everything quiet, Burke?" and there had been a grain of comfort in the butler's answer, "Mrs. Moreton is resting, sir." That had been after Parker had ceased to search for the elusive Jowett.

Parker had come up to his hot and silent apartment, but before he set to work he had tried again to get Doctor Levene, at his office, his residence, and his club. The answer had been the same, "The doctor has not been in all evening." When he hung up the receiver, Parker wondered how long it would be before the shadowy figure which had dogged all his movements that afternoon and evening would make its way up the fire-escape and probably into his very bedroom? Very likely some one was already in hiding there.

As he smoked, Parker had been listening as well as thinking. He felt no inclination to look out of the window; there was a deal of moonlit space out there and he was up high, but one of his dining-room windows gave on the fire-escape. He had expressed his defiance of the "shadow" by opening the window wide and leaving it open, but in all his coming and going, he had kept an eye on it. He was asking himself whether he would be more likely to sleep if the window were closed and latched, and decided that it would be a humiliating concession to his nervousness. Then he wondered about the lights and decided, with a sort of grim humor, that he would leave the light in the library burning; it would keep the shadow from pos-

sibly stumbling over chairs and thereby startling Parker out of the sleep he was determined to get.

Parker rose then to go the rounds and had just switched off the hall light when a bell in the kitchen regions pealed, his front door-bell, pressed by a determined hand. Parker dropped his cigar and then cursed both himself and the intruder, "You damn fool! . . . Why couldn't they wait until to-morrow!" He saved his rug from a burnt hole, and promptly opened the door.

It was Driscoll Moreton who stood before him, white-faced and hollow-eyed, his hair damp on his forehead and his hat under his arm.

"Hello!" Parker said with an uncontrollable note of relief. "Come in." And then "Been drinking?" It was the first time in his acquaintance with Driscoll Moreton when the young man could be described as "disheveled," for his tie was askew and his white trousers were grass and dust stained.

"No," Driscoll answered quietly, "I'm sober." And he deposited his hat on the hall table with the air of one who knew what he was about. Then he looked at the lighted room. "Aren't you alone?"

"I'm not certain," Parker said rather grimly, "but I'll see whether we can have a room to ourselves for a time. . . . Come into my bedroom."

Parker led the way in and, while Driscoll watched him, he locked the doors, looked under the bed and

in the closets, examined the bathroom. "It's all right," he said finally. "Sit down, Driscoll."

"So they've been on your track too," Driscoll said without surprise.

"I was followed from Moreton House this afternoon—quite openly and apparently followed," Parker answered, "and I found when I reached the hotel that my things had been gone through. I was fool enough to leave in my bag at the hotel a rough draft of Moreton's will, and it was gone. The will itself is safe enough, I had it in my breast pocket and as soon as I reached town I got it into a safety-deposit box, took a taxi and was double quick about it. I can't understand why they'd want that draft of the will, but evidently they did want it."

"They're taking a lot of unnecessary trouble," Driscoll said heavily. "I'll solve the mystery for them presently."

"What do you mean?" Parker asked quickly.

"I came to tell you, but first there's something else: I ran into Levene at the station, here in New York, I mean, and he told me that he'd tried his best with Aunt Lilian, but all he could persuade her to do was to hold off until to-day. He told her it was too late in the afternoon to get lawyers and that sort of thing, and that she ought to think out her case anyway, not go at it in too much of a hurry."

"She's going ahead then?"

"Levene said he couldn't do a thing with her. He

said he'd never seen her in such a state, perfectly white with rage and not a bit of hysteria. The best he could do was to get a short delay." Driscoll spoke even more dully and monotonously. "Levene talked for some time. He said that Aunt Lilian is convinced now that the whole thing has been a plot, the will and Uncle Mathew's death. And she accused Nixie—she thinks the chauffeur helped her. Levene said he didn't know what to think now. He said he couldn't conceive of Nixie's having done it, but, since talking with Aunt Lilian, he felt sure that the only thing which could possibly stop Aunt Lilian, have her come to some sort of agreement with Nixie, would be to convince her that Nixie had no hand in the—murder. Levene said that Aunt Lilian was determined to fix the crime on Nixie. . . . Levene wound up by saying that, if it was murder, whoever did it might as well come forward now, for Aunt Lilian was bent upon a complete exposé."

When Driscoll began his monotonously delivered speech, Parker had been about to seat himself. But he had paused, had straightened and had folded his arms, and stood looking down at Driscoll with much the same expression he had worn when standing over Moreton's body. He was both listening to and studying Driscoll, his low monotonous voice, his air of physical and mental exhaustion which was curiously commingled with determination. When Driscoll concluded, Parker remarked in an expressive way:

"Oh, did he? . . . And what did you say?"

"I didn't do much talking—all I said was that I knew Nixie had no hand in it, and that I was glad that Aunt Lilian was going to hold off till to-day. I didn't tell him why, but he very likely guessed—he looked at my arm as if he did."

"Guessed what?"

"Why, that I meant to give myself up." Driscoll spoke in a dully matter-of-fact way, like one who has lived with an idea so long that he has lost all feeling.

"Oh—" Parker said slowly. Then, "Was it Levene's talk that suggested the idea?"

"No. I made up my mind after seeing Nixie."

"You mean when you took the envelope to her—after the will was read?"

"Yes, she told me then."

"Told you what?"

There was a touch of impatience in Driscoll's answer. "Why, that I did for Uncle Mathew. That's the way I hurt my arm. I didn't know what I was doing, of course—I was crazy drunk."

"*Nixie* told you that!" A surge of color darkened Parker's face.

"Yes, she told me. She told me to tell you too, that she meant to fight—in her own way."

Parker looked at him and said nothing. The silence held for some moments, until Parker reached for a chair and sat down. "Well—" he said tonelessly. "This is something quite— new—" He passed his

hand across his face and through his hair, a gesture of bewilderment rare with him.

"You see," Driscoll continued, "whenever I was hard up I used to envy Uncle Mathew his money and I was always pretty certain he'd leave me some. That may have been back in my mind, but the real cause was Nixie. At one time I was nearly crazy with jealously. She wouldn't have anything to do with me, and I broke over once, that was about six months ago, and said a lot of things to Nixie which I didn't really think. She insists that I did think them, 'deep down' in me, but I know I didn't—I was jealous of Uncle Mathew, that was all. I repented what I said to Nixie, I can tell you! Still, jealousy's a beastly thing, and I guess it was still in me—I know I was still mad at Uncle Mathew, at what he said to me at dinner, about my wanting Nixie and that being a venture he wouldn't help me in. I mean it must have stuck in my mind, got into my subconscious self, as Nixie says. Then, don't you see, I'd read that book of Hoffman's and I must have remembered the bottle of poison I'd seen in the medicine cupboard that afternoon. . . . It must have come about that way—and I was clean drunk." He stopped.

Parker had regained his usual poise; he had watched Driscoll's face, his expression of commingled weariness and earnestness, and he had listened intently. "How much do you actually remember of that night—after you went up-stairs?" he asked.

"Mighty little—I don't remember anything after getting to the top of the stairs, except that sometime or other I fell about. I have the vaguest sort of impression that I fought with somebody, but, before I talked with Nixie, I'd decided that I'd dreamed it, for I don't fight when I'm drunk—I write a damned good article for my paper usually, then start out to see New York. If I'm awfully over, I simply go to sleep and set to again the next day—until I've finished with my spree. . . . I've tried hard to remember more about Saturday night, but I can't. . . . Once or twice, when I thought of having read Hoffman's book and thought of the bottle of poison in Uncle Mathew's medicine chest, it came over me cold that possibly I did it, that I got my sprained wrist that way, but I simply couldn't believe it of myself—until Nixie told me."

"How did she know you did it?" Parker asked.

"I didn't ask her—I didn't think to, for I knew she wouldn't say such a thing if she didn't know for certain. . . . I thought it out afterward, though: she must have seen me leave the study, seen me make up the back way perhaps. Very likely the chauffeur saw me too, and she made him clear out. If he cared for her, she could make him do that. And she would too, if she was determined to shield a Moreton. She told me she realized that I didn't know what I was doing, and that she always remembered that I was a *Moreton*. . . . Nixie's fine all through, Parker—

just see how she went through that inquest, stood up under all that questioning and suspicion against herself and never told on me—just because she was loyal to the name Uncle Mathew always made her feel was her own! The least I can do is to clear her. She doesn't love me, of course, how could she, an irresponsible thing like me? but she's loyal! I don't know that she loves anybody—the big thing in Nixie is her *loyalty!*" Though dazed to the point of indifference, very evidently suffering from shock, and physically and mentally exhausted, Driscoll had roused for the moment into tense feeling. His vehemence shook him from head to foot.

Parker moved restlessly and again his cheek darkened, but he merely asked, "What have you thought of doing?"

"Why, I wanted to tell you first, of course. Before I saw Levene, I'd decided that I'd tell you first of all and then do whatever you thought would be best for Nixie. After what Levene said about Aunt Lilian, that clearing Nixie might make her see some sort of reason, I thought I'd tell you and then tell Aunt Lilian, do it before she gets her lawyers. Afterward I could go to the authorities. . . . That's about as far as I got in planning, though I've had time enough, Lord knows! You see, Parker, I got a fit of weakness or something: it was coming out of Moreton House into the sunshine that did it. It came over me that going to the chair wouldn't be so bad, but to have you

fight for me the way you'd be bound to do and get me locked up for years, or, worse, an asylum—well, it got me. And I was thinking, too, that Aunt Lilian wouldn't be likely to let up on Nixie, even then. I started to walk out through the country and before I got myself together it was dark and I was miles from the station. I just missed a train, too, and had to wait, so I didn't get into town until eleven."

Parker wondered how much more talking Driscoll could stand. His voice was getting weak and his face more gray; he was evidently nearing a collapse. But there was one more question he must ask:

"You say Levene met you at the station—at eleven o'clock?"

"Yes. He was on the platform. I ran against him as I got off the train, and he stopped me and told me what I've told you. . . . It was then I noticed I was being shadowed, for I recognized one of the two fellows who were standing behind Levene and me while we talked. It was Darcross, a Secret Service man. There was no reason for Darcross and the other fellow to be hanging about—there were only we four left on the platform. Then, when Levene and I separated, Darcross followed Levene, and I knew the other fellow would follow me. I walked several blocks to make sure and found that I was followed, and that the fellow wasn't being careful about it—the sort of thing they practise when they want to break a criminal's nerve—let him know they're there every minute

and arrest waiting for him at every corner—that sort of thing. I'd have cared more if I hadn't known their ways—I knew I'd be allowed to go wherever I wanted to. I went to the hotel first, found you'd moved, and with that fellow at my heels all the way. . . . Is that the way—they've—trailed—you?" He had grown too hoarse to go on.

Parker nodded. "It gets one's nerve—even when you understand. I decided that, if there was going to be an arrest, I'd rather have it happen here."

"Well—I won't keep them waiting long," Driscoll articulated with difficulty. "Gad! My voice's—going back on—me—" and he began to cough. After his fit of coughing, he asked more clearly, "You think that's the thing to do, don't you—to go to Aunt Lilian, or send some one to her first thing in the morning, then attend to the other?"

Parker had been waiting for the question and now he rose. "I suppose it is—if you're bent upon it," he answered quietly.

"I *am*!" Driscoll said hoarsely but with decision.

"Then do something for me," Parker said in the same matter-of-fact way. "You know that I mean to stand by both you and Nixie, but don't go punk on my hands, will you? . . . I'll turn on the water in there and you get a bath, then get to bed. If there's anything to drink about the place, I'll get it for you, then you try to sleep and give me a chance to think."

"Not whisky—I won't touch it!" Driscoll said with

sudden passion. "I got a whiff of it near the station and it made me deadly sick! I almost went under."

"No, no—I meant a cup of tea or coffee. There must be something of the kind in the pantry," Parker answered soothingly. "You go on in and get your bath." And without appearing to do so, he watched anxiously the effort it cost Driscoll to rise from his chair and his staggering movements toward the bathroom. He hung about until Driscoll came unsteadily in, apparently more tired than refreshed by the bath; so much so that Parker helped him into bed.

"You'll feel better now," he said encouragingly. "Tea ought to fix you up." There was an abrupt tenderness in his voice.

"I do feel—done—" Driscoll confessed faintly.

Parker hurried out to ransack the pantry for a possible canister of tea, and as he searched about his suppressed feelings found expression in muttered speech. "*Done!*" he said with vehemence, "I should think so! That *girl!*"

He found no tea, but something which he considered better, a can of consommé. In his haste he scarcely gave it time to heat. But when he came to Driscoll's bedside with it, he had composed his features into impassivity. "Just drink it," he said steadily. "You've got to keep up, remember."

Driscoll appeared to find it a difficult task, but succeeded finally and lay back with closed eyes, and Parker

said kindly, "That's right. . . . Now you try to sleep."

"I won't sleep," Driscoll answered dully. "Lying down may rest me, though."

"Want the light out?"

"No. I had enough of the dark—out there in the country—" and Driscoll drew a sharp breath.

Parker went out and closed the door carefully behind him. Then he walked straight to the telephone.

XXVI

I'M DONE

THE first gray of morning had not yet begun to mingle with the warm electric glow in Parker's apartment when a second peal of his front door-bell put a stop to his steady walk up and down his library.

He had been walking for the better part of an hour and a half. At intervals he had gone in for a word with Driscoll, an inquiry about the light, an offer to sit with him, any word which would assure Driscoll of his presence and support and which at the same time would not excite him. For Driscoll had not slept; he had lain quite still but with eyes wide open. In the last half-hour a hot flush had appeared in his cheeks and his brief answers to Parker's questions had been so thick as to be almost inarticulate; he had become restless and irritable. Parker had bound a wet cloth about Driscoll's head and had slipped in frequently to change it.

When the bell rang he went swiftly into the bedroom. "Just my housekeeper, Driscoll," he said reassuringly. "I'll shut the doors so she won't disturb you."

"It's morning, isn't it—what are we losing time for?" Driscoll demanded with the irritability of fever.

"We can't do anything for another two hours," Parker declared decidedly. "You leave it to me, Driscoll."

Driscoll muttered weakly and impatiently and Parker hurried out, closing the door as he had said.

But it was not his substantial-looking housekeeper who stood at his front door. It was Nixie in automobile coat and veil who stepped in. "How is he?" she asked before Parker could speak.

Parker had known that it could not be his housekeeper, that it was too early for either his housekeeper or for Nixie to come, and he had braced himself for further trouble. In his surprise he forgot the greeting he had prepared. "How did you get here so soon?" he demanded.

His question was curt enough, but not more so than her answer. Nixie had given his grim face one swift appraising glance. "Never mind about that," she said. "Just take me to him, please!" She had jerked off her veil and was pulling off her coat.

Parker was instinctively polite and though his face lost none of its sternness, he helped her with her coat. And, somewhat curiously, the conventional strain in him, his New England inheritance, asserted itself. "I didn't expect you for another hour—there's no one here but Driscoll and myself."

"What difference does that make!" she returned. "I was in town, not at Moreton House. When you telephoned to Moreton House, Burke pretended to give

you a message from me, that I'd start in as soon as I could get ready. He did it on his own responsibility, then called me up and told me. . . . Now take me to him, please!" She had flung aside her coat, had tossed back her always rebellious hair, and stood the epitome of action, cheeks afire and eyes bright. It was also evident that she was keenly anxious and in haste.

But Parker had something to say. He had flushed hotly and his brows had come together. "What did you mean by telling that poor boy such an abominable falsehood?" he demanded. "You've about killed him! He worships you, so I couldn't tell him that you had deceived him in order to save yourself—it would have driven him mad. . . . I've stood loyal to you, Nixola Allen, but I'm done! I don't know what you are—in spite of everything I've refused to judge you—I considered myself your lawyer, not your judge—but this last is too much for me! I've no use for sheer cool-headed cruelty; . . . I'll look after that poor boy, but your tussle with Mrs. Moreton may go to—" Parker caught himself up on the word, then added, his tense anger settling into as determined a threat, "You'll tell him the truth, whatever it is, and do it in a way that won't hurt him too much, or I'll go to the authorities and make a clean breast of all I know. Burke got that impression when I telephoned to him, and now I've warned you." He walked to the bedroom door and put his hand on the knob, still looking at her from under frowning brows. "Are you going to do what

I've told you?" If he was simulating anger he did it well, no actor could have done better.

Nixie had grown very white, for the first time in his knowledge of her she looked really frightened. Her lips were unsteady. "Of course I'll tell him—that he misunderstood—me—" she answered submissively.

"Very well," Parker said coldly, and opened the door. Then, as if he doubted her word, he stood within the room and watched her.

Nixie went directly to the bed. "Driscoll?" she said softly. "What's the matter?"

"Nixie!" Driscoll gave a convulsive start and jerked the wet cloth from his eyes. The girl bent over him. "Nixie—" he repeated and choked. He had clutched her by the arms and was looking into her eyes.

"You poor thing!" she said, and at that Driscoll drew her down beside him, his arms went about her and he buried his head in her lap.

"I don't care—as long as you're—here—" he answered brokenly.

"It's all a big mistake—indeed it is," she said softly. "I'll tell you in a little while."

Then Parker went out and closed the door. He went to the big front window of the living-room and sat down, and for the second time that night he swept his face with his hand and ran his fingers through his hair. "Lord—" he said, and there were weariness and relief in the expression, as well as several other emotions.

XXVII

AN APPEAL AND A REFUSAL

FOR another hour and a half Parker either moved about his apartment or sat by the window. Morning had come and with it his housekeeper. The cook would not arrive until evening, but breakfast was a meal his housekeeper assured him she could easily manage, for it appeared that she had stores of provender of which Parker knew nothing, and a borrowing acquaintance with other apartments. She seemed far more concerned by Parker's appearance.

"Your holiday hasn't done you a mite of good, Mr. Parker," she declared. "You look pretty bad."

Parker had explained that he had been up all night with a sick friend he had taken in, and had been so anxious over him that he had sent for the girl in whom the young man was interested. "She's been playing nurse, and he'll come around all right," Parker concluded. "The young lady and I will want some breakfast, an early breakfast."

For it was evident that Nixie was in no haste to depart. For an hour she had talked, low and steadily, Parker knew because he had paused a number of times

in his walk and had listened to the murmur, Nixie speaking and occasionally Driscoll's deeper voice. The words were indistinguishable, and Parker was reminded of the night at the hotel; now, as then, the conversation was evidently grave—probably momentous. Parker felt now, as he had on that occasion, that he was quite out of it, and he was uncontrollably restless, a feeling of emptiness and loneliness and extreme dissatisfaction, much as he had felt on that well-remembered night. He was also telling himself that he had denounced Nixie a little too soon; there were things of which he was absolutely certain, but in this matter of Driscoll's he had only Driscoll's version, and a love-obsessed man was the most unreliable creature in the universe; after which reflection Parker shrugged ruefully.

There was silence now in the next room, and yet Nixie did not appear. Parker told his housekeeper to watch for her and then he took a hasty bath and shaved. But, when he came back to the library, Nixie was not there and the silence in the next room was unbroken. Parker had looked forward to a tête-à-tête breakfast; he wanted *his* hour with her, she certainly owed *him* an explanation, and he had a sudden hot feeling that Nixie had escaped him—until he saw her coat and veil lying on the chair. She had certainly not gone without them, for, even in the moment of denouncing her, he had noticed how she was gowned—that she had evidently flung a coat over her semi-neg-

ligee, a boudoir-gown, Parker would have called the loose net-draped construction, hardly a dinner or an evening gown.

While Parker had walked the floor or had sat by the window, even while talking to his housekeeper, intermingled with his thoughts and all his planning, had been the pricking consciousness of Driscoll's hot face buried in Nixie's satin lap. He granted that his irritation was unreasonable, as unreasonable as the vivid annoyance he felt at the long silence in the next room. But, even while granting it, he allowed his impatience to get the better of him, for finally he rapped on the bedroom door; he had breakfast as his excuse.

He rapped, and receiving no answer, rapped again —waited—then opened the door. Then he walked to the bed, for the silence was explained; Nixie was there, sitting on the bed with her small slippered feet doubled under her, her back braced by a pillow and her head dropped sidewise on her shoulder. Driscoll lay full length under the sheet, his cheek resting on Nixie's hand and, as if for double security, his hand held her wrist; they were sleeping as soundly and as profoundly as two children. . . . Driscoll had fallen asleep with his cheek pillowed on her hand and her wrist tightly held, and she had watched for a time and then her eyes had closed—that was the way of it.

Parker stood for a while looking down at them. The electric light still burned and the sun warmed the win-

dow-ledge, the room glared with light, but it had not waked them. It made every detail clear. Driscoll's was the sleep of exhaustion; he was pale and his features had the sharpened look of one who had been ill; he looked like an infinitely tired boy, younger than Parker had ever seen him look, for dissipation had thickened his features somewhat, and now that look was gone.

But it was Nixie, Parker was studying. There was color in her cheeks and slightly parted lips. Her dark curls partially covered her face and lay on her bare shoulder, making her skin look very white in contrast, and in the bright light her yellow satin gown shimmered, its golden tint enriched by a purple net overdress. For whom had she donned all this glory, Parker wondered? And only a few hours after the last words had been said over the master of Moreton House! She reminded Parker of a vivid-hued butterfly with wings folded—and a sleeping child. One bare arm lay extended on the bed, the pink palm of the hand upward and the fingers half curled.

Parker thought of the strength of those same small fingers and the cold gray eyes which dominated her face when awake. Asleep, she looked like a little girl.

. . . Parker thought of the frightened look in her eyes when he had denounced her; she had been frightened not angry, and entirely submissive, and there had been a certain satisfaction in asserting himself. He thought of many things and with peculiar

intentness of this apparently complete reconciliation with Driscoll and what it might mean. She was so utterly *unfathomable.*

Parker also thought of the coming day with its cloud of difficulties. And yet she was able to sleep like that! He had not been able to sleep. . . . He had told her that he was done with her. All talk! He had gone on puzzling over her and her affairs and would continue to do so. . . . And they had no time to waste.

He touched her bare arm. "Miss Nixie?"

She waked easily and with only a slight start, a downward look first at Driscoll who had not stirred, then up at Parker. "I fell asleep," she whispered. Then she looked startled. "My! What time is it?"

"Nearly seven—breakfast is almost ready." She appeared to have forgotten his anger, and Parker spoke and looked an entire stranger to severity.

"I'm glad it's not later," she said, relieved. "We mustn't wake him—I'll try to get my hand away," and she drew it by degrees from Driscoll's lax clasp, pausing anxiously when he stirred and sighed, as gentle and as careful in her movements as if she guarded some one well-beloved. Parker watched and wondered.

She crept off the bed finally, then, when her feet refused to support her, reached for Parker's support. "My hand and my feet are perfectly numb," she complained in a whisper. "And there is a fearful glare

here—it'll wake him. . . . Let me sit down a minute and you draw down the shades. The light's still on, too."

Parker obeyed her, making the room as dark as possible, and then Nixie announced in a positive whisper that she would stay where she was for a few minutes. "I want to wash. You go, and I'll come in a little while—I won't keep breakfast waiting."

With the amused consciousness that he was being ordered about in his own house, Parker did as he was bidden. She seemed to feel perfectly at home in his bachelor quarters and not a whit embarrassed. . . . It was a decided relief too, to be able to smile after that night of anxiety; a pleasant interlude.

In a few minutes Nixie joined him in the library, and Parker was instantly arrested by her appearance; he had never seen this girl before. Only the shoulders and arms of youth could have endured the bright morning light which flooded the room and not have suffered; Parker had already noticed that Nixie's flesh tints defied the searching light, it was her expression which was new to him, a certain softness and radiance. She was very beautiful, far more so than Parker had thought it possible for her to be.

Her manner was perfectly easy. "I am sorry I went to sleep," she said brightly. "I had been up all night —I came in from Moreton House at midnight and after I reached my apartment I didn't go to bed."

"Your apartment?" Parker asked, but with curiosity

carefully eliminated from his question. He had decided to be extremely tactful in his manner, possibly then she might unbend and really converse.

"Yes—the little place Mr. Moreton took for me—out near the University."

"You had some distance to come then last night?" Parker remarked.

"I had the car—Murray, the new chauffeur, brought me. He had brought me in from Moreton House."

There was a faint smile in her eyes, Parker thought, a glint that came and went, and she added: "I meant to see you to-day, but I didn't think it would be this way. I didn't even stop to change," and she glanced down at her gown, but without any apparent self-consciousness.

Parker thought it best to make no comment. "There are things we ought to talk about," he answered, and now his manner was genuine. "I confess that I have been terribly worried and puzzled, particularly since the occurrences at Moreton House yesterday. We must have a full talk, Miss Nixie—I can't see how else we are going to meet what is before us to-day. In fact, I am at a standstill." Nixie had completely ignored his outburst, and Parker was relieved. He considered that his denunciation of her had been as unlawyerlike a thing as he had ever done—he had been as unlawyerlike as she, throughout, had been unclientlike. Still that did not excuse him; he had allowed his feelings to get the best of him; it was ridiculous.

"We'll talk after breakfast," Nixie said. "Is this where you live? It's a very nice apartment. I like this big room so much. I think there ought to be plenty of books in the room where one lives, not the formal library like the one at Moreton House." She had taken the seat Parker had offered her and was looking about her with interest. "I like it," she added.

"I have lived here only about four years—I own my apartment, so I did about what I liked with it. I tried to take off all the newness I could, for most of the furniture is old. When my father died, I came in for all the old family things. Everything back there in the dining-room came from my home."

Nixie turned to look and met the amazed eyes of Parker's housekeeper. She had come to announce breakfast, and, for the moment, had forgotten her errand, for Nixie was an arresting vision.

Parker's active sense of humor was stirred and he also felt somewhat uncomfortable on Nixie's account, she was certainly a suspiciously bright-hued apparition. He instantly discovered, however, that Nixie was entirely at her ease; she looked at his sedate housekeeper in the same way in which she had looked at his furniture. All he said was, "Is it breakfast, Mrs. Bowen?"

There was a degree of severity in her answer. "It's ready if you are, Mr. Parker."

Nixie rose promptly, and Parker thought that he caught the same glint in her eyes that he had noticed

when she had spoken of leaving Moreton House at midnight. She passed his housekeeper with a slight inclination of her head, and, even before she was seated at the table, she remarked, "That is your father—and mother?"

She was looking at the portraits opposite, a fair-haired, dreamy-eyed man of over-refined features, and the companion portrait, a strong-featured woman with blonde hair plainly dressed, and a thin-lipped, resolute mouth; hers was a decidedly cold and haughty face.

"Yes—New Englanders, both of them," Parker answered. "My family dates back beyond the Revolution."

"You are not like either of them," Nixie said thoughtfully. "And yet you are—rigid—like your mother, underneath. . . . Mr. Moreton was right, you're New York spread over Boston. And you look like—" she stopped.

"A Jew," Parker supplemented. "The intelligent type, I am glad to say. . . . I don't know where I got my looks, I'm sure."

"You are good-looking as well as intelligent-looking," she answered with conviction and entirely without coquetry.

Parker laughed. "Thank you," he said and flushed.

But Nixie was still looking at the portraits. "I wonder how it feels actually to belong to a family. . . . Mr. Moreton thought that I did not belong to Trixie Allen, the woman who left me to the circus

ɔupe, but I think I did. I think that she was my ɔther and that at one time she had been something ite different. . . . There are some things I remem- r way back, a house out on the desert—I remem- r how the sun used to go down into the sand, and oves of cattle—and a man who ate at the table and metimes took me on his knee while Trixie cooked at e stove. She was little and pretty. . . . I re- ɛmber waking up, Trixie was holding me, and we ɛre on a horse. It was night-time, moonlight, and was still everywhere. After that I remember trees I remember them distinctly, for I had never seen al trees before. Then I remember the circus, all out it, so I must have been older. I remember just ɔw Trixie looked in her fluffy skirts. She used to ıgh and toss her hair when the people applauded— e liked it. I never saw her after those first recollec- ɔns, so she must have died. Then there were the ars of traveling about and learning the trapeze and lancing weights—until the Moretons took me. I ɗn't even know just how old I was, but I think I am arly twenty-one. . . . I think Trixie was my ɔther and the man in the desert was my father and at my mother ran away from the sand and the cook- g, and because she was my mother she took me with r, and because she didn't want my father to find us, e wouldn't tell anybody anything. Perhaps he took r from some show and she was lonely on the desert I don't know—" The housekeeper who had gone

into the kitchen had returned and Nixie stopped abruptly. She took up a spoon and began to eat her grapefruit.

Parker had listened absorbedly, and, as they sat for some time in silence, he wondered just what would be his impressions of Nixola Allen were she robbed of the Moreton House background? If he were seeing her for the first time, an unknown girl, some friend of Driscoll's called in, as he had said to his housekeeper? He would think her unconventional, very perfectly poised and resolute, apparently frank, but in reality possessed of great reserve, the sort of woman who will brook no encroachment and knows well how to keep and hide a secret—a woman of decided character. . . . Parker thought of that night at the hotel —and other things—and put aside his breakfast; food was distasteful, but he drank his coffee.

He watched Nixie eat her breakfast in a healthily girlish fashion, though somewhat absently, for she was evidently thinking, and after a time he asked, "Do you think I had better get a doctor for Driscoll?" He wished that she would talk of Driscoll; she had not even mentioned his name.

Nixie shook her head. "All he wants is sleep. . . . . When he wakes up he will know what to do."

Parker pondered her answer and could make nothing of it, unless she meant to tell him that she had taken possession of Driscoll and that Parker need not

concern himself about him. He said nothing, but her answer stiffened his resolve, and, as soon as they rose from the table, he said, "My study is across the hall—if you will come in there, we can talk."

"Very well," she answered, and Parker heard her sigh.

But when they came into the small room where Parker kept some of his law-books, Nixie refused a chair. "No, it's not worth while, for I have so little to say." She stood beside the desk and looked down at his papers, stirred them with a restless hand. Then she looked up at him. "Mr. Parker, I may make you very angry and if I do, I am sorry, but all I can say is to ask a favor of you?"

Parker flushed and eyed her alertly; she meant to escape him, if possible. "I'll grant it, of course—if it seems best for me to do so."

"It's this: will you please not think or do anything further about my affairs? . . . I have a very good reason for asking this favor of you."

Parker did not answer at once; he folded his arms and studied her. Finally he asked, "Driscoll told you, I suppose, about his conversation with Doctor Levene and of Mrs. Moreton's intentions?"

She nodded. "Yes—Driscoll told me everything."

"You think it best then to have Mrs. Moreton go ahead—charge you with two crimes?"

"I think I shall risk her changing her mind. . . . You see, I know Mrs. Moreton better than you do."

There was another pause, then Parker asked: "You are acting under advice then, in this matter?"

Nixie hesitated, then said with evident embarrassment, and at the same time with resolution: "Yes—I am. . . . But I don't want to be questioned, and I shall not tell who my—adviser is. . . . Oh, and I want to give you this—thank you very much, but I haven't needed it." And she took from the bosom of her dress the envelope Parker had entrusted to Driscoll the day before, and laid it on the desk. She had flushed warmly and looked thoroughly uncomfortable, though determined.

"I am to consider myself dismissed then?" Parker asked dryly.

Nixie looked beyond measure embarrassed and at a loss for an answer.

"Do you think you have treated me fairly?" Parker continued. "From the beginning you have refused me any sort of an explanation. You have treated me with distrust, even with suspicion. I am not hurt at being set aside—I think I know now under whose direction you have been acting, and, in a way, I'm greatly relieved. I have a great deal of confidence in Mr. Jowett, and in spite of the fact that he has run away with a wrong idea. It's *your* distrust of me that hurts." Parker meant to speak without feeling, but he did not succeed.

Nixie looked utterly distressed. "I know how I must seem to you," she said, "but I have been com-

pelled by others to act as I have. I am in a dreadful position, and I have had to do the best I could. . . . I can't help it." Her eyes grew hot with tears.

"What I've wanted from the beginning is to clear you," Parker returned. "I have realized that you are a very young girl, Miss Nixie, and that you may have been sinned against—I fully realize that you must have been in a most difficult position, an intolerable position."

His genuinely earnest speech appeared to hurt Nixie beyond endurance, for she flamed scarlet and turned as if to leave the room, then caught herself back and stood her ground. "I have nothing to say—not one word!" she said passionately. "Kindly just let my affairs be and don't think about them or about me! As for Driscoll, I've explained to him and he has promised me to do nothing and say nothing for the present. . . . I'm going to see how he is, and then if you'll call a taxi I'll go." And she walked out of the room, her head high.

A little later, Parker helped her with her coat; he took her down to the taxi-cab, but not until she was seated did he gather sufficient resolution to say: "I'm sorry I offended. I think you misunderstood—I've been pretty loyal to you, Miss Nixie."

She looked at him in her cloudy, enigmatic way. "And I to you," she retorted, " 'in spite of everything,' to quote your own words. . . . Good-by."

XXVIII

THE WORKERS IN SECRET

"AT last!" Parker said. "Well, Jowett, I'm glad to see you." And he smiled at the visitor his office boy had ushered in.

It was five o'clock and Parker was preparing to leave his office. He pointed to a chair, "Sit down, will you—I've been wondering all day whether I'd have this pleasure."

Parker's lips smiled, but his eyes were keen. He noticed at once that Jowett had his hands in his pockets. Some day he meant to tell the detective that that attitude of his was a "dead give away." There were few men who could control their features better than Jowett, but a detective should know how to manage his hands as well as his features; Jowett was evidently "stirred up."

"I can't," Jowett answered. "I've simply come to deliver a message: you're wanted at once."

"What for and by whom?" Parker asked alertly.

"By the Workers in Secret," Jowett returned with the air of one who relishes a bon mot of his own. "One of the 'Workers' sent me along with the message."

"The Department of Justice, eh?"

"Sure—no less person than the chief, I guess."

"What does he want with me, Jowett?"

"Search me, Mr. Parker! I can make a guess, same as you, but I don't *know* a thing more about it than you do—just what it is they want of us."

"You're summoned too, then?" Parker asked quickly.

"Yes, and glad of it. I'm tired of waiting around with some one at my heels every minute!"

"You too!" Parker exclaimed in surprise. "Why, Jowett, I thought you were in on the whole thing! I thought it was you who had set them on, and I was glad of it! If I hadn't been so certain of it, I should have gone to them myself."

"'Set them on'—nothing!" Jowett returned a trifle curtly. "Why, three hours after Moreton was found they were thick about the place, but I didn't know it until just before the inquest. Then I got an intimation from one of them that the less I said at the inquest, or elsewhere, the better, which intimation I obeyed. I was told too, that, the inquest over, I had better proceed to the garage and wait for a telephone message. You were there when it came, just an order to come on into town and go about my business as usual and *hold my tongue,* which order I have obeyed to the letter—that's the reason I couldn't let you get at me last night."

"But you've told them your story, haven't you?" Parker asked.

Jowett's voice was extremely dry. "I have They evidently haven't been in need of it. . . You remember when you came to the garage lo for Miss Allen, just before the inquest? Well five minutes before that a youngish chap stepped me in the tool-room where I was intent on Allen's trail, and gave me the intimation I spok his credentials first—they were all right—and only a dozen words or so. When you knocked, h me to the garage doors and that's the last I saw of Where he came from I don't know, for I'd locke doors. He and others had been about since b daylight, that much he told me, and that I better incompetent at the inquest. I succeeded in doing I think—to perfection."

Under ordinary circumstances, Parker would been amused at the hurt to his professional pride Jowett could not conceal. But he was too intent another matter. "Who notified them then?" he a

"I don't know—if you don't," Jowett ans meaningly.

"It was not my doing—you're wrong there, Jo Parker declared.

"And you didn't advise its being done?" Jowet with a note of genuine surprise.

"Certainly I didn't. I thought you were lo after it, and I preferred to have it that way."

"Um! . . . Well, some one got into com

cation with them at once," Jowett said thoughtfully. "It must have been the doctor. I didn't tell you, but in speaking of Driscoll's wrist, he said, 'wrenched,' not 'sprained.' He said that in Driscoll's presence. And he said to me afterward, 'I knew Driscoll had been drinking when he was talking before dinner about Madame Steinall.' I asked who Madame Steinall was, and he said, 'A woman who came from Vienna just before Germany declared war, and set up a beauty-parlor in New York. Ever since we declared war, she's been under suspicion—at least that's what I've heard. I don't know her, but I've heard she's fascinating, and I know that one of my patients, a prominent woman socially, was warned against her.' The doctor wouldn't or couldn't tell me more than that, but it gave me a new idea, and long before the inquest I decided that, at the inquest, I'd lie low and just as soon as I could get away I'd take the whole matter to the Department of Justice. But they were already at work —some one had been quicker than I—the doctor, I think."

"Probably—" Parker said slowly. "I fancy—the doctor will prove our salvation. . . . Miss Allen hasn't been confiding in you, then?"

"Confiding in me! Not she. . . . What made you think that?"

"I suppose because she hasn't been confiding in me," Parker said with a candor which was unlike him. "I

thought very likely you'd been holding a club over her." He looked curiously pleased and relieved, so much so that he colored slightly.

For the first time since the conversation began, Jowett looked amused, but he refrained from speaking his thoughts, except obliquely. "No, I haven't seen her since I caught her in the garage and asked her where Holt was and she went off with her head up. . . . . I told you about that encounter with her."

Parker rose rather hastily. "Yes, I remember. . . . So you've been doing exactly what I have, simply holding your tongue, sitting still and waiting for orders, eh? . . . Well, the order has come, at last." Parker dusted his shoes with his handkerchief, tossed the handkerchief aside, then put on his hat with an air of decision. "I suppose we'll be questioned together, and we'll be two dolts if we don't come away from the interview with some inkling of who they're after."

"I hope so—I've spent a good deal of valuable time guessing."

"Jowett, what did you do with the bottle you found, and that pocket-case of mine?"

"Turned them over to the Department of Justice as soon as I got back to town, them and the little wad of paper I found in Miss Allen's waste-paper basket. I explained the circumstances, merely how I had found them, and called attention to the finger-prints on the bottle." Again Jowett's voice was dry. "One would

suppose that they'd have asked me a few questions, but 'Workers in Silence' would fit that crowd—I was dismissed with nothing but a polite 'Thank you.'"

"Well, they appear to want us now," Parker remarked cheerfully.

Two hours later, Parker and Jowett came out together into the corridor of the topmost floor of the highest building in New York. There was no one in the corridor but themselves, it was after seven o'clock and the business rush was well over. "Let's do our talking here, there's no one about," Parker suggested, and they turned to the right, to a window which commanded a superb view of the harbor and the reach into the grayly misty open beyond, the ocean pathway to "over there." The room from which they had come could not have been better chosen; from its windows a telescope could be used to advantage.

They turned their backs to the view, keeping an eye on the empty corridor. "Well, how much wiser are you than you were before we went in there?" Parker inquired promptly.

"Not an iota," Jowett answered decidedly.

"That was skilful work," Parker said with admiration. "That man's worthy of his place."

"I turned myself inside out, thoughts and feelings and facts—everything," Jowett said. "It's more than you did."

"You weren't in my shoes," Parker answered

gravely. "But he understood—you noticed, he d
press me on certain points."

Jowett nodded. "I wonder how Miss Allen f
at his hands?"

Parker said nothing. There were matters a
which he had been absolutely silent: the night a
hotel when Nixie had been his neighbor, Nixie's r
ing in the woods with the chauffeur, and every
cumstance which might tend to establish an inti
between Nixola Allen and Moreton, or between Ni
Allen and Holt. And he had not mentioned Dris
visit to him the night before. Every question ar
swer to which would involve a revelation, Parker
countered with all the wit he possessed, and, as he
said, beyond a certain point he had not been pre
from which fact Parker had drawn the same co
sion as Jowett, that Nixie had been questioned b
they had been, their questioner did not need Par
testimony on certain points, he was already infor

Parker did not answer and Jowett broke the
ment's silence. "I wonder if they have any idea t
selves who did for Moreton?"

"I think they have," Parker said. "We were c
in merely to clear up some details."

"That argues that you have some definite idea y
self," Jowett said quickly. "Who was it, Mr. Park

"I don't know, Jowett."

"Of course you don't *know*," the detective

with a touch of annoyance. "I honestly don't know what to think. What I'd like to be certain of is that the right person will go to the chair for that crime—I'll sleep better when I know that." He flushed warmly.

"I am afraid *I* can't accommodate you," Parker said meaningly.

"Nonsense, Mr. Parker, I never attached any importance to that pocket-case incident—that is I didn't after I thought the thing over. I detailed the circumstance in there, of course, but you noticed he didn't question you about it."

"Because he was already informed: there are twenty men in my club, Jowett, who know that I've carried that case for ten years—ever since the train wreck in which I escaped and the physician who was traveling with me was caught, pinioned under a burning car. It was two awful hours before they got him out and he was dead then. The man knew he was done for—from the very beginning—but he actually spent two hours of agonized dying with the means of ending it right there in his breast pocket and a free hand for administering the dose to himself. I disagreed with that man. I got that pocket-case and I've carried it ever since. I used the chloroform on a stain I got on my white trousers—in the Adirondacks—and forgot to fill the bottle when I came to New York, I was too interested over Moreton's will to think of it. . . .

Doctor Levene says there's a morbid streak in even th sanest person—that's a manifestation of my morbi streak, I suppose."

"I guessed there was some such explanation," Jowet said apologetically. And then, probably with the in tent of making the most generous amends in his power he said, "There's one person I hope will weathe through all this—and that's Miss Allen."

Parker was looking worn, keener-eyed and thinner lipped than was usual with him. At Jowett's unex pected conclusion, he flushed to the eyes. "Do you Jowett?" he said, quite as boyishly as Driscoll migh have said it. He looked infinitely pleased.

Jowett reflected that love did queer things to a man that he wouldn't be Parker for anything—not with Nixola Allen as the woman in question; but he said "Yes. I took a liking to her at the inquest—she wa fighting for something, for some *thing,* I mean—no just for somebody, though she was doing that too, t the best of her ability. . . . I don't make her ou at all, but I like her better than I did."

Though still in a glow, Parker had recaptured some of his usual caution. "I confess I don't understand her," he said with a good assumption of impersonality. "I fancy that that chief of the 'Workers in Secret' knows more about her than any one else. . . . I think we had better be going, don't you?" And he led the way toward the elevator.

But, as they waited for the express, Jowett noticed

that Parker's expression was still bright, and there was a pleasant light in Parker's eyes when he asked abruptly, "You're married, aren't you, Jowett?"

"Finest little woman in the world, and two kids," Jowett answered heartily.

"You noticed that the chief spoke to me on the side, didn't you—just before we came out? . . . Tell your wife that he said to me, 'I want that man on our staff—he's the right stuff and he's got the right spirit—the Government needs his kind.' "

Jowett's hands sought his pockets. "He did!" He was silent for a moment, then he said decidedly, "I'd like it. I'd like to be doing something for America, just now—I've often envied the fellows who are going over. I'd fight the enemy over here—like hell! That's what Mathew Moreton was doing."

They parted a little later on, at the foot of the elevated, and when they shook hands, Parker said: "By the way, Jowett, when you are one of the 'Workers' watch out for your hands. When you are stirred up they go down into your pockets. In my office there, this afternoon, I knew you were nervous about their calling me—your hands were in your pockets."

"Thanks for the pointer," Jowett returned and his eyes twinkled. "I'll give you one in return for it: when you're upset, think you're up against something particularly hard, don't fold your arms—opposing counsel might take advantage of it, you know."

They both laughed.

XXIX

A CALL FOR HELP

WHEN Parker reached his apartment, he found that Driscoll was not there. His housekeeper told him that Driscoll had slept until well into the afternoon, then had eaten a substantial meal and had departed.

"Did he leave any message?" Parker asked.

"Only that he would see you later, Mr. Parker. I think he went to see the young lady who was here this morning, for as soon as he was out of bed he called up a number and I judged it was that lady he was talking to."

"Very likely," Parker said. "How did he seem, well?"

"He looked peaked, but he ate a good meal. He's a nice young man, I think, Mr. Parker—he's so frank-like. He made a fuss over giving me trouble and said he'd take me to dinner some time, that is, if he wasn't locked up one of these days for being a fool. He joked quite a bit, but I think it was most of it put on—he looked pretty sober when he wasn't funning. He went to my heart some way—I hope that young lady isn't giving him a bad time of it, or he isn't in some trouble.

He didn't mention her, so of course I didn't say a word."

It was evident that Dricoll had exerted his usual charm; he went to the heart of most women. Naturally his housekeeper was consumed with interest and curiosity, but Parker had no information to give. "Has any one telephoned or called to see me?" he asked unsmilingly.

"A gentleman telephoned twice, a Doctor Levene. The first time he telephoned he asked if a Mr. Driscoll Moreton was here or had been here. I didn't know the young man's name who was here, so I said I'd find out. He was eating his dinner when the man telephoned, so I asked him, and he said, 'Tell Doctor Levene that no one by that name is here or has been here, so far as you know.' So I told the gentleman that. Then he called up again, this evening."

"What did he want that time?" Parker asked.

"He asked for you and if I knew where you were. I said you were late for dinner and I didn't know when you'd be back. I told him you usually left your office before five o'clock."

"What time was his first call, Mrs. Bowen?"

"About four o'clock, I think."

"And the second time?"

"Just before you came in."

"It's all right," Parker said. "He'll probably call up in a few minutes. I'll go to the telephone if it rings," and he applied himself to his dinner; his housekeeper

knew that expressionless air of his; he would tolerate no more conversation. And when, in a few moments, as he had predicted, the telephone rang, he went into his study to the extension to answer, closing the door behind him.

But it was not Doctor Levene who asked, "Mr. Parker?"

"Yes. . . . Miss Nixie—" he answered. He had caught his breath in surprise.

"I want to see you, Mr. Parker—very much."

"At once?" he asked.

"Yes—can you come?"

"Certainly." And his anxiety made him add, "You mean you need me?"

"I want you to come, yes—and as soon as you can. You remember the number I gave the taxi-man this morning?"

"Yes, I remember. I'll have my car out and start at once—will that be all right?" There was anxiety in every word he uttered.

"Yes—quite. It's just that I want to see you. I'm all right—don't worry!" And she rang off.

It was the cheerful note Parker remembered so well. "Oh, I'm all right!" she had said to Moreton. "Don't worry, dear—" with exactly that lilt in her voice, and that had been after half a night of weeping! There was no judging from her voice what the trouble might be.

XXX

FROM THE BEGINNING

IT was a charming little apartment into which Parker was ushered, and by Burke. When Parker sprang out of his car, the old butler had limped from the entrance of the apartment-house and had met him.

"You here, Burke!" Parker had exclaimed. He did not know whether to feel relieved or not; he studied the old man's face keenly.

Burke looked worn and tired, but he smiled. "I came in early this morning, sir—Miss Allen sent me down to meet you."

"She's not in trouble, I hope?"

"Just keen to see you, sir. . . . I'll take you up at once."

Parker asked no more questions. He was rather white and realized that he was short of breath. He had driven at a rate which was in itself a sufficient strain, and he had had anxiety tugging at him as well. They had come up in silence, into the room which overlooked the University grounds. "I'll tell her, sir," Burke said, and disappeared. He must have been somewhat excited, for he forgot to take Parker's hat.

Parker stood and looked about him; a longish room

and simply but daintily furnished, a large shaded lamp in one corner, a few water-colors, a good deal of white shelving stocked with books, a comfortable desk-table, and a high-backed divan drawn up before the French windows which opened on a small balcony. The apartment was high up, open to sun and air, a charming place—Moreton had chosen well.

So Parker thought as he waited. He faced the curtained entrance into some room beyond, for he expected Nixie to enter by that way, but she came in through the hall and was at his side before he realized.

"You came very quickly," she said.

There was a smile in her usually cold eyes that was the first thing Parker saw; then that she looked grave but not troubled or grim. She was simply dressed, in white, some thin material through which her arms and shoulders showed quite plainly. The only ornament she wore was a very beautiful silver comb which with difficulty kept her curls in place.

"I drove rather fast," Parker answered.

"I am afraid you did. I'm afraid I frightened you, but I didn't mean to. It was just that I've wanted so long to be able to speak out, that I was keyed up." And her small hands doubled into fists made an expressive gesture.

"So that was it," Parker said, and the tense lines in his face relaxed. He smiled at her and deposited his hat on the table.

She nodded with a decision that shook her curls.

"Yes. . . . Let us sit by the window—it's cooler there. See, put this pillow behind you, so—it'll be more comfortable." And with much the air of one waiting upon an invalid, she chose a pillow and placed it in the corner of the divan, patted it and looked up at him, gravely and at the same time with a half smile.

"And how about yourself?" Parker asked. "Are you comfortable that way?"

He was amused as well as pleased, for she had climbed upon the couch much as a child would upon a bed, had gathered her feet under her and sat without support, facing him, her hands clasped in her lap. She looked purposeful.

"Yes. This thing is so wide and high up and I am so little, I'm more comfortable this way. . . . Mr. Parker, I am going to begin straight from the beginning and tell you everything."

"That is what I have wanted, Miss Nixie—from the beginning."

"I know it—but I couldn't. . . . Mr. Parker, I told you this morning about the time before the Moretons took me. I told you on purpose. That much I could tell without breaking any promise, and now I'll go on from the time the Moretons took me. . . . It was summer and they took me to Moreton House. It was the most beautiful place I had ever seen. I loved it. I didn't find it difficult to live in a different way, I did whatever I was told, for, you see, I had been *trained,* like any horse or dog. It was simply a differ-

ent kind of training. But a horse or a dog doesn't think—not as a human being does—and my brain was all my own. I simply went on thinking, just as I always had, only in a different environment and of course all the time learning new things. I judged of people and of what it was wisest for me to do or not to do, just as I had in the circus. I had learned not to cry when I was hurt, to think a great deal and say very little, and to keep out of trouble.

"I couldn't like Mrs. Moreton. I did just what she told me, but I thought she was the most ignorant and one of the most foolish women I had ever known. She knew nothing whatever about *life,* and she hadn't a genuine *feeling* in her. What she called her feelings were mere affectations. In the beginning, as long as I remained a very little girl, she used to take me about with her and talk mysteriously to her friends about 'the child she had rescued from dreadful conditions,' and so on. And her friends would look me over as if I was something in a side-show. She never was really affectionate to me, never for a moment forgot that I had been a circus brat. She engaged teachers for me and then forgot to ask them what they were teaching me, talked to Mr. Moreton about adopting me and was angry with him for not agreeing, and at the same time, when I had diphtheria, she got into a great fright and left the house at once and stayed away until I was well. She was disgusted with me for giving her that trouble.

"It was then Mr. Moreton began really to like me. He had always been kind to me, but he had left me altogether to Mrs. Moreton. I was very ill, but he wasn't afraid to come into my room. He used to tip-toe in and pat my hand. 'Never mind, Baby—we'll bring you round,' he'd say. I was taken ill in the town house, and the minute I could be moved, Mrs. Moreton wrote that I must be sent out to Moreton House and the town house be disinfected from roof to cellar so she could come back. It was winter and I did not see her again until summer. She had lost all interest in me by that time.

"But Mr. Moreton used to come. He used to play with me—he fitted up the gymnasium and he got the canoe and we used to walk about the country together. I knew from the beginning how it was between him and his wife—there were scenes, it was a constant friction. I was very sorry for him. Oh, Mr. Parker, she was so unreasonable! Nothing he did pleased her, nothing he said satisfied her. I don't know how he had managed to bear it for so many years.

"All that summer after my illness it was a wretched household, visitors coming and going and things apparently smooth on the surface, but just misery underneath. I was fortunate that summer, for Mrs. Moreton had no more interest in me than she had in any one of the servants—half the time she forgot that I existed and was quite indifferent to Mr. Moreton's liking for me. I wore dresses that were too short for me and

looked like a little girl. . . . But I wasn't a child any longer—and I loved Mr. Moreton. I'll love him to the last day of my life, my dear good friend—"

Night had come and the room was only softly lighted, but Parker saw her cheeks darken and her eyes fill. She bent forward in her earnestness. "Mr. Parker, he *petted* me. You don't know what that means to a decent little circus brat! I was a hard, wise little girl, hard almost to the core, but not quite. I hadn't known that there was such a thing as tenderness in the world. He was sorry for me and he petted me. Then he began to love me and to delight in me—then he loved me with every bit of love in him; I was his daughter, his companion and comforter, and his loyal friend. He found that I had a good brain and he respected me for it. He told me all his plans, his hopes, his unhappiness. . . . And I would have walked through fire for him! . . . I did walk through fire, for two years—until a strange thing happened, then—"

She stopped, caught herself up, drew a long breath and straightened. "I'm not telling you in the way I meant to," she said more to herself than to Parker. "You see, Mrs. Moreton began to understand, or, rather, she began to misunderstand. Then it was hell. She accused him finally of—of the worst. She never actually flared at me, but she watched me every minute, and most of the time she wouldn't speak to or look at me. When that trouble began, I told Mr. Moreton I ought to go away—clear away—so she couldn't pos-

sibly think what she was determined to think. But she wouldn't have it. She said it was only a trick of his to hide me away and still see me; if he attempted such a thing she would accuse him openly. She would not let me go, yet she made staying a horror.

"Then I decided. I would go right on, be what I had been to Mr. Moreton, the one comfort he possessed, and at the same time walk so carefully that she could not trap me. That last year was like walking in a narrow path thick with eggs which I mustn't break, and my heart aching and burning. . . . But I didn't love Mr. Moreton any the less—with every day my pity grew greater. For I saw more clearly than he: some day the storm would break, she would scream out to everybody the idea that obsessed her. I might be able to bear it—I could go back to the circus—but it would break his heart, for he had woven about me every hope and ambition, all the big plans he was making. I didn't tell him—he had enough to bear. He was thinking constantly of how he could best help in the war, and I advised and comforted—just set my teeth and waited.

"And I watched over Mr. Moreton. Burke was his friend and mine. Burke is very cautious and wise, and we together saved Mr. Moreton many a bad hour. . . . And then there was Doctor Levene." She had paused and her voice and face hardened curiously; she spoke in a stiff-lipped difficult way. "For two years Doctor Levene played his part in our family—he was

the one person in whom Mrs. Moreton confided and to whom she would listen. It was just after he gained his ascendency over her that she first broke out to Mr. Moreton against me. I suspected that Doctor Levene had put the idea into her mind, and I was certain that it was he who advised Mrs. Moreton not to let me leave, and at the same time advised her to restrain herself—above all not to rage at me, for I might leave the house and then Mr. Moreton could see me whenever he pleased. He must have used strong arguments, for she acted contrary to her nature in not raging at me. I utterly distrusted Doctor Levene, and so did Burke. I thought that he was certain I was misbehaving myself with Mr. Moreton, that in time we would be caught red-handed, and that out of the catastrophe he was planning some benefit—perhaps a huge sum from Mr. Moreton. I knew he wanted money. But Burke and I did not tell Mr. Moreton—we were afraid of some terrible scene and a public accusation which would have driven Mr. Moreton frantic. Doctor Levene appeared to have a quieting effect on Mrs. Moreton—in a way, Mr. Moreton was grateful to him, and we left it at that. But I wish we had told him! Oh, how I wish we had! No matter what came of it, I wish we had told him! We didn't suspect the truth, or, rather, Burke and I suspected only part of it, but if Mr. Moreton had known even that part, he would at least have driven that *snake* from the house—!"

Nixie had stopped because she was shaken from

head to foot. Her hand had gripped the back of the divan and she turned her face against her arm. "Oh, if we only had! If we *only* had!" She was not weeping; it was a passion of regret and a profound anger that shook her. The hand in her lap clenched and unclenched and beat against her knee; she was like one enduring torment.

Parker had sat quite motionless until she mentioned Doctor Levene's name; then he had stiffened. He put his hand on her shoulder now, made her feel the weight of it. "Go on, child," he said low but forcibly. "I have suspected him, but only since last night, since he suggested to Driscoll to give himself up. . . . Go on, Nixie!"

She turned a passionate face on him. "No, it was some one else you suspected!" she flung at him.

He was silent.

But the retort seemed to steady her. She took his hand from her shoulder, but not angrily, for she clung to it, held it in both her own. "I don't blame you," she said. "Everything was against us." Then she went on rapidly. "Mr. Parker, Doctor Levene was serving Germany. He began his work in our household before we declared war, and we have been in the war for nearly a year and four months. Mrs. Moreton talked pacifism from the beginning of the war, mostly because Mr. Moreton sympathized so intensely with the Allies. But, don't you see, it called their attention to her. They discovered a situation which they thought

they could exploit, and they began to weave their plans. I never suspected *that*—Burke never suspected either, or we would have told Mr. Moreton instantly. I never suspected that there might be treachery in our house until the evening of the dinner party. Just before I went down to the boat-landing to meet Mr. Moreton —you remember he asked me to meet him at seven o'clock—I found that an important paper he had left with me when he went to Pennsylvania to his steel works, a big scheme of his to help in the war, had been taken. It had been stolen from my locked chest and out of a despatch box to which I had the key. I had looked at it the day before—it was there then. But I didn't suspect Doctor Levene of *that,* not for a minute —why, every one had heard that he was going to the front—he had told everybody! . . . Mr. Moreton and I did not know whom to suspect. Mr. Moreton was not always wise when he got angry, and he said what he did at dinner. . . . Then they killed him—"

She stopped again, apparently unable to go on. But he was firm. "Go on," he said. "You have too much will to give way. Go right on—I'd rather not ask questions—I'll get the straight of it best this way."

"Every word I said at the inquest about finding Mr. Moreton was true—every word Harry Holt wrote was true!" she said vividly. "We left out only one thing: when I saw Mr. Moreton's face, I said, 'Harry, it's a stroke,' but he said, 'No, he's fought some one.' And

I remembered the stolen paper and then the truth jumped at me, and I said, 'It's the Germans, Harry!' And I ran for Doctor Levene—even then I didn't suspect *him,* not until he stood up and said, 'I judge that he took the poison only a few minutes ago, certainly within the last twenty minutes.' Then I knew, and also that Harry and I might be accused. I put aside grief then, everything, except watchfulness. I noticed that Doctor Levene nearly broke down when he found that Mr. Jowett was a detective—his hands grew wet and he wiped them and his forehead. And it was he who suggested the coroner from Ford's Landing—Ford's Landing is a German settlement, more than half the village is German. I noticed, too, that the moment they got Mrs. Moreton to her room, he disappeared, saying that he was going for medicines, and then didn't bring anything back with him. I noticed into whose room he had gone, and when I saw that I thought, I thought *hard.* I had just a minute with Harry and he began to say something, but I whispered, 'Harry, it *is* the Germans. *You mustn't be seen with me.* Go to the garage and telephone the Secret Service—*get them somehow and do whatever they tell you.* Send them to help me—tell them they can trust Burke.' That was all I had time for, but Harry has a good brain and he is used to danger. . . . It was he who saved us, Mr. Parker." There was pride and a determined loyalty in her statement.

Parker was thinking, among other things, of the brain those dark curls covered, but all he said was, "Go on, please."

"Then I spoke to Burke. I told him what I suspected and what I had done. He had suspected too, that's why he suggested a coroner he knew. He was in terror about me, that I would be accused, but I said, 'Don't think of me—just watch, Burke—*watch every minute!*'" Nixie's voice faltered, "Poor old man! He was sick with grief and terrified about me, and he almost broke down. But Burke was a soldier when he was young, and he swore, I never heard such an oath, even in the circus—he swore at Doctor Levene and the count, and then he came up standing—"

"The *count*—" Parker said slowly and deeply. His surprise was so utter that the words were dragged forth.

"Yes, the *count!*" Nixie said. Her voice was vibrant with contempt. "Do you think for a minute that that coward would undertake such a thing alone? He hasn't the courage or the brains! Doctor Levene has been the count's tool, their cat's-paw, but a tool that has cut both ways—they show poor judgment sometimes, those people!"

"What was Levene's object?" Parker asked.

"Money."

"And the count? He's not a German."

"He has passed for a Swiss gentleman for twenty years. He took the name of a good Swiss family—he

has used forged papers for years. He has worked for Germany ever since he was a boy, all over the earth—he has been one of their most trusted agents."

Parker drew his hand from hers and rose. He stood in the window and looked out, his arms folded. Presently he said, and very evenly, "And Mrs. Moreton. . . . That's the most sickening thing of all. . . . They three together—there on the veranda, stealing in on him . . . my God!"

XXXI

THE TINY MARK

NIXIE broke the silence which followed Parker's exclamation. "I want to explain about Mrs. Moreton—if you will sit down," she said gently, for there had been profound emotion in Parker's voice, pity and deep anger and passionate disgust.

He turned, sighed, and sat down again beside her. "Yes, go on," he said. "I didn't mean to interrupt."

"I want to tell you step by step, I'll tell you about Mrs. Moreton a little later on. . . . After I had talked with Burke, I came down to the study and begged you to take charge of the room. I thought that there might be clues there which they would try to destroy. I didn't want Doctor Levene to come into the study. I couldn't tell you the reason, I was certain I was right in my suspicions, but I didn't *know*. I wanted to tell the Secret Service people first and let them judge. I was certain too that Mr. Jowett suspected Harry Holt and me and—and, Mr. Parker, I knew you didn't think well of me. I felt that you thought about me a great deal as Mrs. Moreton did, naturally you would not believe me."

Parker started to speak, but Nixie stopped him. "I lon't want to talk about that now. Let me go on: : asked Burke to watch over the study too, and I cept watch over Doctor Levene. The count never noved from his room. Once Doctor Levene went into Mr. Moreton's room, to the medicine chest—he went is if looking for some medicine. I didn't think it mportant then, but it has proved a link in the chain. Mr. Jowett was going about, but I kept out of his vay, until he went down to the study with Doctor Levene, then I followed and watched all they did." She shivered, then said resolutely, "I knew what Mr. Jowett wanted to discover, and I wanted to know, too. And I was watching Doctor Levene—what was *he* here for? To cover up something, if he could—I felt ure of it. But I couldn't find out what, though I vatched every movement he made.

"When they left, I went to my room and kept vatch, my door a little open. I could see Doctor Levene coming and going—he talked to every one but he count. It seemed to me the Secret Service men would never come, but finally they did. It was Burke who told me. He brought a pitcher of water to my loor, as if I had rung for it. While I took the water, ie whispered that one man was in the empty room beside mine, and that near morning he would come into ny room by the porch and talk to me.

"Mr. Parker, I had to lie down then. I was so re- ieved I couldn't stand up. I had gone about with my

hands and feet as cold as ice and a burning, tight feeling in my head. I think I had been frightfully excited and with my mind fixed on just one idea, the determination to find who had killed Mr. Moreton. When I knew that help was near me, my body gave way. I could still think, but I had to lie down and wait. . . . The man came just before daylight—he said Jowett had gone down-stairs. We talked in the dark with our heads close together, and I told him *everything,* things I haven't yet told you. He had talked with Harry Holt and had advised him, and he advised me. He said suspicions were not facts, and that we must go slowly and very carefully, and that above all the Secret Service must not be suspected of any part in the matter until they could lay their hands on some actual proof. He said that they had never had the slightest suspicion of the count or of Doctor Levene, but that their people were already looking them up, and this might turn out to be 'a huge find.' He said that the coroner, and the jury he would probably get together, came from a pro-German community and that was significant—that the Secret Service men at Ford's Landing would probably be able to give them some information. I asked about Mr. von Betler, and he was positive—he said, 'No. He is an *American*-German, not a *German*-American. We've tried him out. And his wife is a trump—true-blue.' He said Mrs. Insmann was not a spy, a 'conscientious objector,' but not a criminal—they knew all about her.

I asked about Mr. Jowett and he said, 'Let him discover all he can. We will not interfere with him until we are ready. When the right time comes a hint from us will be sufficient. His hustling around on a false scent will put them off—he's a decided help to us.'

"I asked him then what I must do about you, and he said, 'Tell him *nothing*—till we give you permission. Let him go his own way. He'll guard your interests, and that's important. He is a very sensible and cautious man, and a fine sort. It's vitally important that at present *no one* shall suspect that we are at work. We want every one connected with this thing to go his own way—we will learn more that way—there may be more people than you suspect involved in this plot.' I begged a little, I said, 'But Mr. Parker thinks that Harry Holt and I may have done this thing—Mr. Parker thinks the worst of me, and I can't endure it—' "

"Don't say that again!" Parker interrupted with sudden passion. "It's not true. . . . I've suffered in these five days, and I'm aware that there's more in store for me." The admission was wrung from him, in spite of himself.

"You must let me tell this my own way!" Nixie exclaimed, and she went determinedly on. "When I said that to the Secret Service man, he answered, 'You will have to endure what others think—you're working in a big cause, and you've already proved yourself a good soldier. I don't believe Mr. Parker thinks that of

you, for he's a good judge of character. He's simply puzzled—who wouldn't be! Just let him think things out for himself.' . . . There was one thing we talked over, and I didn't agree with him: he thought just what you said now, that Mrs. Moreton had helped those two. I know Mrs. Moreton—I knew that was impossible. She was created to make those who must live with her unhappy—she is foolish, but she would not kill. I clung to that—he couldn't move me. I said, 'Some way they have duped her, that is all.' He said, 'The three were together the entire evening—jealous women do strange things sometimes, Miss Allen.' I said, *'It's as impossible for her to have done that, as it is for Mr. Moreton to have taken his own life*—I know them both, you don't.' . . . In the end it was decided: I was to watch, Burke was to watch; we were to say nothing, simply discover all we could and report. They would do all they could without making themselves apparent, and we must all wait until after the inquest. Then he left me.

"I lay still and thought. I puzzled and puzzled over Mrs. Moreton, but I knew I was right about her. I decided that the study must be watched every minute, and that I would make myself Doctor Levene's shadow. I thought over just what I must say and what I must leave unsaid at the inquest. I had asked the Secret Service man, 'Will Harry Holt come to the inquest?' and all he said was, 'Better for you to know nothing

about him. He's not here, but he's safe—that's all I'll tell you.'

"Then morning came, and I began watching Doctor Levene. He was in Mrs. Moreton's room talking with her, for some time. Then he came down with Mrs. Moreton's order for breakfast to be served in the rooms. He told Burke that he had an order for Holt from Mrs. Moreton, and started out to the garage. Burke whispered to me, 'He knows Holt's gone—the servants all know it.' I followed Doctor Levene to the garage. The doors stood open and when I came in he came out of the tool-room. I know now that he must have gone straight into the chauffeur's room and into his closet and when he heard me come in he must have run into the tool-room by the door which opens into it from the chauffeur's room. Then he walked out of the tool-room into the garage where I was.

" 'I can't find Holt,' he said, and he crossed over to the chauffeur's room and looked in. 'Why, his things aren't here!' he said then. 'The man's decamped—that looks queer!' And he looked hard at me.

"I thought it was stupid of him to think he could fool me. He knew Harry had gone—he had some other reason for being in the tool-room. But I said, 'They just told me that he had gone—I came to see for myself,' and I gave him look for look. I looked as blank as I could and stood just where I was.

"He turned and walked out and went straight to the

house, and then I went into the tool-room and looked around—I couldn't imagine what he had gone in there for. Then Mr. Jowett came in and caught me coming out of the tool-room. He asked me where Holt was. I wouldn't talk to him—I couldn't. I went back to the house and Burke gave me my breakfast in the library so I could keep watch over the study while he served up-stairs. He told me that Doctor Levene had come in and had gone to Mrs. Moreton's room, and in a few minutes he had come out and had asked Burke for the keys to the study, that Mrs. Moreton wanted them. I said, 'Mr. Parker must have them, Burke. Get them and give them to Doctor Levene, then you watch in the library and I'll watch in the back passage.' There was a Secret Service man hidden in the basement and there was a man up-stairs, but they would not want to show themselves—I could go where I pleased and yet not be suspected of any connection with them. I had decided that Doctor Levene thought I was terribly anxious about myself. One thing I was determined on, he should not get into the study and perhaps destroy some evidence against himself.

"So I stood at the foot of the boxed stairway and waited. He came in a few minutes, and up through the basement. I think the maids must have been about in the upper hall and he was afraid to come down by way of Mr. Moreton's room. He must have slipped out and have come around the house. I know now that he was pretty desperate—too much so to be care-

ful, for he hurried up the basement stairs and went straight to the window-door. He unlocked it and stepped in—he had turned to lock it again, but I was at his elbow. His expression when he saw me was a thing I'll remember—he looked clammy, there were tiny beads of perspiration on his forehead.

"But he had his explanation ready. 'Mrs. Moreton wanted me to get things ready here—it's about time for the coroner.'

" 'I have been thinking so too,' I said. 'If you'll go through the room and unlock the library door, Burke can help you.'

"He had to do it, and I stayed where I was, close to the window-door, until the coroner's party arrived and they all came into the study. Then I had to go."

Nixie had paused, and when she continued there was a vibrant note in her voice. "And now I can explain why I acted to you as I did after the inquest. When you found me in the boxed stairway after the inquest, I was waiting to talk to the same Secret Service man who had talked with me in the night. The keys I had collected for him—they wanted to fit a key to the study door—it would be better than picking the lock. Directly after the inquest Burke had purposely quarreled with the footman and had taken on one of the Secret Service men whom we called Sanderson, and another man, Murray, had hired himself to the head-gardener as chauffeur. I had plenty of helpers after the inquest, but I had no money, so I asked you for

the thousand dollars. I was crying partly because I was so fearfully tired, but mostly because I had been forced to let you go on thinking the worst of me. You had been loyal to me at the inquest, and I must seem to you to be acting abominably, and suspiciously. . . Then, in spite of everything, you came back and were nice to me—I haven't forgotten how kind you were, and how it must have seemed to you that I was simply taking advantage of your kindness by asking for money—" Her voice failed her.

Parker put his hand on hers. "I have my explanation to make also—when you have finished," he said gently.

"Yes, and I am always interrupting myself," she said with more spirit. "What I meant to tell you was, that it was I who saved Mrs. Moreton from arrest. There was a Secret Service man hidden where he could hear everything said at the inquest, and yet he didn't hit upon the right explanation. He was puzzled by Mrs. Moreton's testimony, for she was so evidently telling what she believed to be the truth. It was I who guessed how it had been, and when the Secret Service man came to talk to me, after you had gone, I told him my theory. The idea had come to me during the inquest, when her maid testified that she had brought Mrs. Moreton's smelling-salts down to her. I said to the Secret Service man, 'I believe they drugged her — with a smelling-salts bottle — she wouldn't know what they were doing. They could

easily have fixed up a bottle that looked just like her own and have drugged her that way—for a long enough time to do their work.' He said it was a big idea—he praised me. He told me that his people had searched both Doctor Levene's office and his apartment in New York, and the count's apartment, that they had been busy over the two all night, but that they had not found anything as yet. He said that the count had just left in his car and was being followed, that Doctor Levene was up-stairs telephoning about the funeral arrangements, and that you were talking with Mrs. Moreton in her room. He said he was going to have you and Driscoll shadowed, more as a warning to you both to hold your tongues and be careful than anything else, and Doctor Levene and the count would be watched with all the skill the Secret Service possessed. When I told him of how anxious Doctor Levene seemed to be to get into the study, he said he would give him every opportunity to visit the study, but he would not be alone there—the man who would be hidden there might find his movements interesting. But Doctor Levene didn't try to get into the study—he hurried over the funeral arrangements and went into town on the same train with you.

"Mr. Parker, we know now that with the intention of throwing suspicion upon me—if there should be suspicion of murder—they had taken a small empty bottle from my room, washed off the label and had thrown it into my waste-paper basket, the sort of thing

a girl might do, but not an experienced spy. They filled the little bottle from a larger one which they had with them, and put the larger bottle in Mr. Moreton's medicine chest, thinking that its presence there would go to prove suicide, or, should murder be suspected, that it would most likely throw suspicion on me or some one belonging to the family.

"We also know now that after the murder both the count and Doctor Levene were in deadly fear, for the count had bungled his work, and there was something in the study which they wanted desperately. We know now that Doctor Levene bitterly reproached the count for the mishap which had put them in such danger and that the count said very little, merely that he was willing to gamble on the chance of the object's being hidden where it would escape notice, probably for years—that they were safe enough, and that if any one was suspected it would be Harry and myself. The count told Doctor Levene that he felt certain the inquest would result in a verdict of suicide. He told him that they must not talk together for several days—that they would meet in New York, when it was safe to do so. He told Doctor Levene to *do nothing, to hold his tongue and wait for the inquest.*

"But Doctor Levene is a nervous coward, really, and all that night he was casting about for a scapegoat; when he dressed Driscoll's arm, he tried to plant in Driscoll's mind the idea that perhaps Driscoll had committed the crime. He meant to direct suspicion against

Driscoll, for he told Mr. Jowett that falsehood about Madame Steinall. The tale about her was utterly false —she left Vienna because of her hatred of the Germans. She felt that Germany was using Austria, and the end would be the ruin of her country. Doctor Levene was also desperately anxious to examine the body with Mr. Jowett as witness, hoping that then no further examination would be made, for, Mr. Parker, there *was a mark on the body.* Doctor Levene managed to hide it from Mr. Jowett—Mr. Jowett was deceived.

"Doctor Levene was so terrified that he altered the plan the count had made. He took from Mr. Moreton's medicine chest the bottle they had placed there. He meant to hide it in Driscoll's room, where Jowett could easily find it. Then, before morning, he decided that Harry and I ran the best chance of being suspected, and he took it to the garage and hid it where it would certainly be found, on the shelf in the chauffeur's closet—that was what he was doing in the garage, when I followed him. The coroner is a German, though not even Ford's Landing suspected it. A few years before the war the coroner's name was Heinric, and he changed it to Henry. That was before he went to Ford's Landing to live. Though Mr. Heinric did not suspect it, the Secret Service had been watching him. Doctor Levene and the count knew him—it is probable that he has done work for the count in the past. Doctor Levene knew he would pick a pro-

German jury—the Germans at Ford's Landing hated Mr. Moreton—and Doctor Levene hoped for the best, but until after the inquest he was terrified.

"The result of the inquest was a relief to both Doctor Levene and the count; it gave the count time in which to try to escape, and it put a little fool's-courage into Doctor Levene. He gained a little more assurance when he found that what Mrs. Moreton had once told him was true, that Mr. Moreton had arranged in his will that his body should be cremated. The count had considered that bit of information when he had made his plan. Mrs. Moreton told Doctor Levene about her conversation with you after the inquest, and he hoped that in a few hours the mark on Mr. Moreton's body would be destroyed. She also told him that a new will had been made, but he had lost interest in that matter, for he was thinking too desperately of how best to save his own neck.

"But in the matter of cremation he miscalculated, for the Secret Service people took the body in charge as soon as it left the house, and their examination threw a good deal of light on the way in which Mr. Moreton had been killed. . . . But I'll tell you about that later—I want first to tell you more about Doctor Levene. . . . He went back to the city with you, and then he tried hard to see the count—he wanted his money—he meant to run. He saw several of his society friends on Sunday evening and talked about being hurriedly sent on a mission by the

Government—somewhere—he was very mysterious and important over it, and all the next morning he called in what money he could. He must have been pretty frantic, nearly insane, for he began to be aimless in some of the things he did; that was after he discovered that the count did not mean to be found, that the count evidently meant to escape and leave Doctor Levene to his fate. At the time you telephoned to Doctor Levene, just after reading the will, he must have been desperate.

"But he had to come. He had to keep up appearances and he had to ward off danger if he could. And the Secret Service people decided to let him come—they weren't ready yet to arrest him. When I left the room, after the will was read, I was going to come into town and tell the chief about the will and ask him to stop Mrs. Moreton if he could, but when Driscoll came up and told me that Doctor Levene was coming to Moreton House, I let my affairs go, for we were all of us convinced that Doctor Levene would try to get into the study again. After what they had discovered from their examination of the body, we thought we knew what it was Doctor Levene wanted to find in the study. We had searched every inch of the study, but we had found nothing—perhaps he would find it for us. When I spoke to Sanderson about 'the bolts,' I was telling him to prepare the study.

"Doctor Levene came and if ever a man worked hard to dissuade a woman, he did. He even hinted to

Mrs. Moreton that she might be bringing suspicion of murder upon herself. All he said to her was overheard by one of the men, and he thought the remark significant, but I didn't. Some of them thought my theory of the smelling-salts far-fetched, but I had clung to it—I had faith in it. And Doctor Levene's threat didn't move Mrs. Moreton, she was immovable—for once in her life she succeeded in not being hysterical—she was cold with hate of me. She did actually telephone a firm of lawyers, but it was too late in the afternoon—they had left their offices. All Doctor Levene could get from her was the promise not to call them up until in the morning.

"He gave her up finally. She had dinner in her room, and Doctor Levene had his dinner alone in the dining-room. He must have liked it sitting there with the vision of Mr. Moreton standing before him, making his fine honest speech against spies! . . . He told Burke that he was going to take the nine o'clock train into town, and he went to the veranda and smoked. The whole first floor was perfectly quiet—we kept it so. There was a man hidden in the library and one in the study—the study door was not only unlocked but open. Doctor Levene sat for almost an hour on the veranda. Then he went into the hall and listened, then went straight through the library and into the study—he almost ran. He seemed to know just where to go, for after one wild look around, he went directly to the register set in the floor, in the far

corner of the study. He tried to lift it out, he tugged at it frantically, but it was screwed to the floor—then, as if suddenly terrified, he ran out of the room. He caught up his hat in the hall and went to the station.

"He was followed, but in the study the men were already at work. They took out the register, then they went to the basement and took out the furnace pipe, and, finally, way down at a bend in the pipe, they found what Doctor Levene was after. . . . They arrested the count that night, last night, in a seaport town in Connecticut where he hoped he was hidden—he had driven himself there directly after the inquest and we think that he had a plan for reaching some submarine—and Doctor Levene they arrested early this morning. . . . . Mr. Parker, you have let me tell my story my own way, and now I want to tell what the Secret Service learned from Doctor Levene. His kind are always ready to try to save themselves by telling on a fellow plotter: he gave them the count's history—I have already told you that—then he told about their connection. It seems that Doctor Levene was crazy for social advancement, just as some women are. To get ahead he had to have money, and to make money he had to have patients. He was sly and shrewd and a flatterer; he worked his women patients for all he could get out of them—money and social favors. The count met him and thought him good material. He introduced him to the Newport crowd, doing it in an unobtrusive way. He loaned

him money, too. Then he tested him and found that he was willing to do their work for good pay.

"Doctor Levene spied on a number of families, collecting information for the count. Mrs. Moreton seemed to them good game, and the Moreton household offered opportunities. Mrs. Moreton was always ready to receive foreigners, and Mr. Moreton was deep in war interests. They might be able to learn a great deal. So Doctor Levene made himself necessary to Mrs. Moreton, and there is no doubt that, both before we declared war and afterward, she entertained, without knowing it, more than one German spy. Laterly, Mr. Moreton was so rude to any foreigner who came to the house that he couldn't come again without exciting suspicion. The count never came, though Mrs. Moreton often invited him—he was too wise for that. He came only when they had decided on a somewhat hurried plan.

"You see, in the beginning, their idea was simply to keep going the state of things which existed in the Moreton household, for it gave Doctor Levene an opportunity to spy on Mr. Moreton. Then they discovered things: that Mr. Moreton was furnishing money for testing and developing certain explosives, and that he had a big idea for promoting the efficiency of our Secret Service. His idea was that our Secret Service was our important home army, and it was his intention to use both his money and his influence to gain every possible advantage for what he called, 'Our

Secret Service Army.' He wanted them to have a more definite recognition as '*soldiers.*' It would be an incentive for the ablest brains to join the Secret Service. And Mr. Moreton was using all the influence he possessed to get more severe laws passed against spies. Mr. Moreton was a menace to Germany. And with the count and Doctor Levene it was also a private enterprise. Mrs. Moreton would be left a fortune which they thought they would be able to handle—she was so foolish and gullible that they were certain they could easily rob her.

"So they meant to destroy him. But it was their discovery that Mr. Moreton intended making a new will which hurried them. It was they who stole the draft of the will from your room at the hotel, not the Secret Service people, as you thought. They got the first hint of a will being drawn on Friday, and on Saturday morning they secured the draft of the will, and a note you had made about the Safety Trust Company. The note was: 'Safety Trust Company signatures can not be secured until Monday.' You had taken one bag with you to your office—you were going from your office with Mr. Moreton to Moreton House, and—"

"I remember the circumstances," Parker interrupted. "The witnesses were going out of town for Saturday and Sunday. But Mr. Moreton was determined to get the will signed and at his request the witnesses stayed until Saturday afternoon and affixed their signatures."

Nixie nodded. "But the count didn't discover that. He thought you were going to Moreton House with Mr. Moreton for final consultations with him about his will. He made his plan then and offered Doctor Levene a big sum, and it was arranged that they would divide equally whatever they could steal from Mrs. Moreton in the future. The count was to do the deed, and Doctor Levene was to assist. It was a supposed suicide the count had planned and Hoffman's book had given him the foundation for his plan. He also had another use for Hoffman's book—in case murder was suspected, the presence of the book in Moreton House might fasten suspicion upon some one who could not prove as perfect an alibi as the count meant to furnish for himself and Doctor Levene. So he placed the book on the library table.

"The count had secured an invitation to Moreton House from Mrs. Moreton who was only too pleased to entertain him. And fortune seemed to favor them, for Mrs. Moreton was not feeling well and telephoned Doctor Levene to come—he did not have to ask for an invitation. . . . They took with them the bottle of poison which Doctor Levene afterward hid in the chauffeur's closet and a bottle of smelling-salts which they had prepared, and Doctor Levene had his physician's pocket-case which he usually carried. They held several consultations during that Saturday afternoon and adapted their plan to circumstances. They made one mistake, they took that paper from my box

—they were very anxious I shouldn't have it in my possession after Mr. Moreton's death—and they gambled on the chance of my not missing it until Mr. Moreton was out of the way.

"Then there was that scene at dinner, and one would suppose that it would have stopped them, but the count argued that Mr. Moreton's suspicions were aroused and that meant great danger to them, so the sooner he was disposed of the better, also that Mr. Moreton's outburst at dinner together with his remark to Mrs. Moreton in the afternoon—that he would be driven to suicide—would help to establish suicide. He argued that the scene at dinner would convince any one that no German spy would dream of killing Mr. Moreton after such an occurrence. The count considered the dinner scene helpful to their plans.

"They had decided that Mrs. Moreton must be their alibi, and they took advantage of circumstances: they were left alone with her, and Mr. Moreton was alone within a few feet of them, in his study. They managed to have Mrs. Moreton send twice for Burke and Mrs. Moreton's maid sent down to them with the smelling-salts—everything must appear just as usual. When Mrs. Moreton was upset by Doctor Levene's pretended reproaches over her having asserted her pacifism at dinner and she said she felt exhausted, Doctor Levene who had made the substitution, gallantly held *his* bottle of smelling-salts for her—she was used to such attentions from him. Then for fifteen minutes she

knew nothing, and Doctor Levene watched over her while the count did his work." Nixie stopped.

"Go on," Parker urged.

She continued with difficulty. "Mr. Moreton was sitting with his back to the door into the library, his head bent, so—over his desk—and the count stole up behind him—and thrust just here,"—Nixie leaned forward and placed a cold forefinger on the back of Parker's neck—"just here, at the base of the brain, under Mr. Moreton's thick hair. . . . It was not the poison which the count afterward put between Mr. Moreton's lips which killed him, Mr. Parker—it was the hypodermic injection of the same poison. . . . That was the count's wonderful idea: only a most powerful and skilful man could have done what Powell's murderer attempted to do—the thing was physically impossible, and the verdict would be suicide—and his tiny murderer's mark would never be found. . . . He could not destroy that fine strong man except by a poisoned thrust from behind. . . . Mr. Moreton turned and struck the count's arm—then he fell. The hypodermic needle flew out of the count's hand, slid along the polished floor and fell into the register. But the count had to finish his work before he could look for it, and he was doing that when he heard Harry and me come up the basement stairs. Then he ran back to the veranda. And that poor foolish woman didn't even know that she had been unconscious—Doctor Levene told

her she was a little faint and dizzy and distressed, that they wouldn't talk about pacifism any longer! . . . They have those two murderers, Mr. Parker—but—it won't bring back . . . but he's—gone—"

There was perfect silence. Parker sat motionless.

XXXII

THE INEXPLICABLE EXPLAINED

THE silence held for some time; then Parker stirred. "The Prussian system!" he said evenly. "One doesn't know whether to pray or to hate! . . . To fight with all our strength—it's the only way."

"So Mr. Moreton thought," Nixie answered.

Parker looked down at her bent head and shadowed face. "Don't tell me any more, if you'd rather not. I think I understand now the thing that has seemed unexplainable."

"No. I want to tell you, but I wanted to keep it apart from all that horrible story of treachery. . . . Wait a minute," and she rose and went to the desk-table.

From the drawer she took something, then turned on a light and came to Parker. She gave him a photograph. "You know him," she said.

It was a young man in lieutenant's uniform, a powerfully built young fellow, solid jaw, long upper lip, high cheek-bones, and keen direct eyes shadowed by his cap-brim; he was rough-featured, but a soldierly figure; his uniform became him. It was Harry Holt.

Parker looked at the photograph, but without surprise. "Yes, I saw him this afternoon, down-town," he said quietly. "I guessed then how it was. . . . He was standing in a Red Cross automobile, talking to a crowd near the City Hall. It was his voice which attracted me first, then what he had to say. He has a wonderful voice, Miss Nixie. When I saw who it was I listened for half an hour. He was talking to the East Side and a big sprinkling of business men and lawyers. The way he handled that crowd was remarkable. There was about every nationality there and he got at the brain as well as the emotions of every one of us. I happened to elbow Senator Banks—he's a western senator, and something of a dandy. He looked excited. 'Hello, Parker!' he said. 'What do you think of him? Why, he's stuff for the Senate! I've been here for the last twenty minutes, and I'll be damned if he hasn't made me laugh and cry! Who is he?'

"We were standing near a gang of toughs. They were not laughing. One of them nudged another, 'Shirt-bosom don't know Hal Kelly!' he said. 'Wow!' Then his pal jeered at us: 'Shiny-Shoes better go over the top, like us guys is going to. Them trenches Kelly stood in would spile him good an' plenty!'

"The talk was over then and, as we got out of the crowd, some one began singing, 'Has anybody here seen Kelly? Has anybody here seen Kel*lee!*' and as we went on the whole crowd was still singing.

"The Senator said to me, 'So that's Hal Kelly! Harry Holt Kelly's his name. This afternoon's paper had a column on him. He went over with the Canadians in the very beginning and was in the thick of it until we declared war. Then he was wounded, about shot to pieces—it took a year in the hospitals to fix him up, but he came out all right and then he came home. He has his commission now, and he's sure to be promoted fast, for he knows how to handle men. He speaks Russian and what-not; the paper said he had had gangs of foreign laborers under him in Chicago, before he went over. He's been talking for the Red Cross this week, made five speeches for them yesterday, and the money simply ran out of men's pockets. If they're wise they'll keep him for the next Liberty Loan, for he has the gift of persuasion, that man!' . . . . And now, Miss Nixie, suppose *you* tell me about him?" and Parker smiled at her. For some reason, his smile brought out the lines in his face, yet his expression was very pleasant.

Nixie had listened absorbedly, her eyes brilliant and her lips slightly parted. "Yes—that was Harry!" she said. "He's very talented—indeed he is, Mr. Parker!" She looked like a child-woman of sixteen, eager and proud.

Parker looked as he felt, a lifetime older than she, years older than he was. "Tell me about it," he said.

She paused and drew in her breath. "What the paper said about him is true: he grew up in a little

town in Illinois and went through high school. Then he got into some huge machine shops in Chicago and very soon he was made foreman, he had several hundred men under him—and he was only twenty-four, too! It was very much as it was with Mr. Moreton—Harry is the same kind, that builds himself up from almost nothing. There were strike troubles in the shops and Harry talked the men out of it—there was a fight on with the labor unions, and Harry helped smooth matters. You see, he had learned to speak the language of the foreigners—he understood them and what they wanted. Then he was promoted to manager of the shops.

"Then the war came and Harry went first thing, just as a volunteer private, with the Canadians, and he saw all those first horrors. He didn't care with whom he fought, provided he could hit men who were such beasts! Then he was fearfully wounded." Her voice faltered. "They—they didn't think he could possibly live. . . . He says it was the fighting American-Irishman in him that pulled him through. Finally he came home. He wasn't fit yet to go back, but he knew he would be in a few months and he wanted a commission. They gave it to him gladly, but he had to wait a little." Her voice grew soft. "It was then I met him—in May. We were in the town-house and I had gone out to the park. Things were dreadful at the house—I wanted to cry and wouldn't, so I went to the park and sat down—it was lovely and green there. In a few

minutes a big, tall young man came and sat on the same bench. I thought how strong he looked—I guessed he had been a soldier.

"Then a little girl came to the bench with her bucket and spade. I spoke to her and Harry did too. But her nurse took her away, so we talked. He told me he had been wounded and that he was expecting his commission. He told me about the war, as a soldier knows it. He talked and talked and I liked his deep voice—no one can help listening to him. Then, suddenly, I felt—shy. I felt as I had never felt before, and I said good-by and almost ran away."

She hesitated for a moment; the color had come back to her cheeks. "I meant not to go back to the park—I held out for three days. Then I went, I couldn't help it, and he was there. He told me all about himself and I told him only that I was Mathew Moreton's ward. He looked blank when I told him to what a wealthy family I belonged, but he saw something in my face which made him ask, 'Are you happy with the Moretons?'

"I told him I loved Mr. Moreton, and he knew I meant it. He asked me then whether he was never going to see me again, and I got all my courage together and said, 'No. You will have your commission and go over, and I'll just go on at Moreton House—Mr. Moreton needs me.' I felt that I belonged to Mr. Moreton, and I ought not to think of any one else. I said good-by and went off, but he came after me. 'I

haven't said "good-by" to you,' he half whispered, and walked away.

"A week afterward I knew what he meant. I was at the lake when Mr. Moreton came back from town one evening and Harry was driving his car. When Mr. Moreton said, 'This is Holt, Baby—our new chauffeur. They put some shot into him over there, but he'll be going back one of these days,' Harry only touched his cap, but his eyes spoke.

"Mr. Parker, I don't know how I looked, but I know how I felt. For a week I had been dying by inches, and suddenly I was well. . . . Mr. Moreton told me afterward that Harry had shown him his papers and had told him that he wanted something to do while he was waiting for his commission. He said: 'Harry is a fine sort, and I told him that the moment he was wanted he was at liberty to go.' He had asked Mr. Moreton to call him Holt and not to speak of his history, because of the other servants. Mr. Moreton told me that of course we must treat him exactly as we would a chauffeur, that Harry understood that. And I said nothing at all. I knew Harry was there to be near me, but I said nothing—it's one of the things for which I'll always blame myself. But I didn't mean to deceive—I meant to hold out to the end.

"I held out for a long time, Mr. Parker—for over six weeks. The first time Harry tried to speak to me, I told him he was Harry Holt, the chauffeur, nothing more. In all that time I treated him as I would the

chauffeur. But he wouldn't go away—he went on being the chauffeur. . . . Then, one afternoon, he told me that he had his commission and must report on Sunday morning. He told me on Thursday. He looked quite white and sick. I couldn't say anything at all—I went to my room and lay down. He was going away from me—they would send him over—and he might be killed. For a time I simply *hurt*. I couldn't think—I couldn't even stand up." The misery of it was still with her, for her voice was husky.

"I lay there for two hours, then, Mr. Parker, something in me broke—I had to go to Harry and feel his arms about me, or I should go mad. I wanted just *him*. The world might fall into pieces—I didn't care what came afterward. I got up and went to the garage. It was nearly evening then and Harry was in his room, sitting with his head in his hands—he was aching for me as I was for him. I went straight to him and neither of us said one word. I remember only that his arms were around me and that my cheek was against his, and that the hurt in me was gone.

"But, Mr. Parker, it is not my nature to do wild things. I may have done impulsive things when I was a child, but never since—until that moment. Harry says that when I began to speak and he still hadn't a thought in the world, only feeling, I said, 'I hadn't thought of it, but it is the way out,' and when he could speak and asked me what I meant, I said, 'Mr. Moreton loves me so he will forgive me, and Mrs. Moreton

can't make trouble for him when she knows that I belong to you.'

"Mr. Parker, Harry drove me into town that evening and we were married. . . . Then we went to your hotel and Harry registered us under our right name, Mr. and Mrs. Kelly. Mr. Moreton was in Pennsylvania—he was coming back to New York that night. Mrs. Moreton was away on a motor trip, and Mr. Moreton had arranged that I was to meet him early in the morning to see the apartment he meant to take for me, for he had decided to defy Mrs. Moreton—things could not go on as they had been at Moreton House—it was beyond endurance. I knew the hotel in New York to which Mr. Moreton was going and I sent a note from my hotel to his, saying that I had come in in the evening and he could telephone me in the morning and I would go with him—that then I should be able to get back to Moreton House before it got so very hot. . . . You must have heard me crying after Harry left me—you see, in a few days he might be taken away from me. . . . Now, Mr. Parker, you know."

"Yes," Parker managed to say without apparent effort, "I thought most of that out, after I saw—your husband in his uniform. . . . I suppose now I am to offer my congratulations?" and he smiled.

Nixie gave him both her hands. "I think I love you, too," she said, half crying.

"As you loved Mr. Moreton?" Parker asked.

She nodded. "It has hurt terribly—having to keep everything from you. If I could *only* have told him—as I have told you. I kept it from him a whole day—I wanted him to see Harry and me together and have Harry ask his forgiveness, too. Harry would have understood Mr. Moreton better if he could have talked to him about me, for Harry was jealous of Mr. Moreton, sometimes. Harry, too, wishes now that he could have asked Mr. Moreton's forgiveness. . . . . But it was too late. All we can do is to follow out every wish of Mr. Moreton's. Harry is really worthy of Mr. Moreton's name—Mr. Moreton loved a good soldier—"

"And so do I—suppose you tell some more things about this husband of yours?" Parker suggested, for she was crying. "Come now!"

She settled down beside him, her hand in his. "He's coming in a little while, then you'll see for yourself why I love him so," she said softly. "Driscoll's coming with him, too."

And while she talked and he apparently listened, Parker thought of her. He wondered what the future would make of her? . . . But she was already made, a resolute, quick-witted, capable woman; there would always be indications of the "hard fiber" Jowett had sensed in her, her lonely unloved and unlovable childhood was ineradicably stamped upon her; and she would never be of the conventional order, that was what Mathew Moreton had meant when he had

called her "an Arab." But, as he had said, at the core she was tender, and she was very lovable—she possessed a compelling quality. Parker recalled Driscoll's remark that the biggest thing in her was a passionate "loyalty." To husband and child and friend and country, she would be unswervingly *true*.

XXXIII

SHE NEEDS YOU

THE entrance of some one into the front hall aroused Parker from his reverie. "It's Harry —and Driscoll!" Nixie said with a note of joy as she sprang up.

Parker rose more slowly, and, when he saw Nixie's husband lift her and kiss her and keep her in his arms and when he noticed that Driscoll's eyes were on them and not on him, Parker reflected that after all love held first place in the world and that an unloved person like himself was of small consequence.

"Harry! Can't you be sensible!" Nixie exclaimed as soon as her lips were free. "Mr. Parker is here!"

Her husband put her down, but he kept his arm about her. "I beg your pardon," he said in his deep voice. "You see, I haven't seen her since morning. . . . I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Parker, and under different circumstances—I've heard a deal of you from Nixie."

His manner was frank and his speech enriched only by its naturally resonant quality. He was totally without affectation, his manner was as direct as the look he

gave Parker. He reminded Parker of Mathew Moreton, less bluff but equally sincere, a plain man born of plain people and possessed of a good American brain.

Parker's smile was his answer. Then he shook hands with Driscoll. "I suppose you've enlisted?" he said. "I must say you look as if you had seen action."

Driscoll glanced at his empty sleeve; his injured arm was still in a sling. "Don't I!" he answered cheerfully. "Dozens of fellows have asked me if I was just back. My war-worn appearance and my friendly acquaintance with Hal Kelly have won me a reputation. It's something of a come-down to have to explain that I'm off to-morrow to learn what most of them tackled a year ago."

He looked "peaked," as Parker's housekeeper had said, but he did not look ill; his eyes were clear and his big mouth was resolute.

"To camp—so soon?" Parker said. "Where?"

"Don't ask me—I don't know."

"Somewhere south of Washington, I bet," Holt said. "That won't be bad winter quarters."

"And no whisky," Driscoll said soberly. "That's what takes me."

"Have you had dinner?" Nixie asked. "There are things ready for you—things you like, Harry."

She sounded wifely and Driscoll's humorous mouth widened. "Yes, thank you, Madame—we have 'messed.'" Then he lost his smile. "I have a thousand things to attend to to-night—I can't even sit

down. I came in just to have a word with Parker . . . and to say good-by to you."

"Oh, Driscoll!"

"Yep!" he said bravely. "I'm sober now, so I'll kiss you good-by without deserving a wrenched arm for my impudence." He looked at Parker. "She told you how I came by my 'sprain,' didn't she?"

"No—but I can guess, Driscoll—it hadn't occurred to me until now, though."

"Of course I didn't tell him!" Nixie exclaimed. "You didn't know what you were doing, and I ought not to have been so angry about it, or to have told you it was your 'subconscious self.' . . . You see, he misunderstood me, Mr. Parker—entirely. I was talking about one thing and Driscoll was thinking about something quite different. I was horrified when Burke telephoned me the impression I had given Driscoll. I ran—without taking off the yellow dress Harry likes. I explained everything to Driscoll that night. . . . It was all a big misunderstanding, Mr. Parker." Nixie was crimson and completely embarrassed.

"You see, Parker," Driscoll supplemented with his usual candor, "I was clear off my head when I got to the upper hall and then I met Nixie coming out of her room and proceeded to be the drunken animal I was. She twisted my arm for me, good and plenty, and pitched me into my room. . . . There wasn't any 'subconscious' business about it, though—a man drunk and a man sober are two entirely different beings,

that's all. I've had enough of the one—we'll see what the other will make of himself."

"Mathew Moreton died to some purpose," Parker answered gravely.

"He did say he had faith in me, didn't he," Driscoll said rather huskily. "I'll think of that if I ever go over the top!"

"And in the meantime you have 'a thousand things to attend to,' " Holt suggested practically.

Driscoll straightened. "That's so. . . . Parker, can I see you in the morning? I want to talk over business. I want you to look after things for me."

"Name your hour, Driscoll."

"Nine o'clock—at your office?"

"Very well."

"And now, Nixie?" Driscoll said in tones that strove to be light. "Say good-by to your uncle!"

She moved from her husband's side and Driscoll put his arm about her. She reached and drew his head down to her. "I want to whisper something," she said softly, and he turned his ear to her lips.

He nodded in answer to her whisper, "Sure."

"Your other ear now," she said, and he obediently turned his head. This time it was a longer whisper and he suddenly straightened, looked down into her eyes for a moment, then put his hand under her chin and bending kissed her forehead. "Men die and men are born —I think the women are our bravest soldiers," he said

reverently. Then he turned abruptly and, as abruptly, left the room.

But it was a cheery note which came to them before the front door closed. "Good-by, Burke—mind you watch over Nixie, old man!"

And Burke's answer, "I will indeed, sir. I envy you, Mr. Driscoll—I'm proud of you, sir."

"I'm a Moreton after all, eh?"

"Indeed, *yes!* . . . God will be with you, sir."

"I hope so, Burke. . . . So-long!"

Holt's and Parker's eyes had met, and Holt nodded. "He'll come out all right," Holt said. "They'll get him into khaki as soon as they can—it's curious the effect a uniform has on a fellow. It braces him morally and physically—the best sort of tonic." Nixie had returned to the shelter of her husband's arm, and he lifted her up as one would a child. "And now do you know what's going to happen to you?" he said tenderly.

"No—"

"You're going to be carried in and put to bed. If you weren't the bunch of steel wires you are, you'd be a wreck after such a week as you have been through. But even steel breaks sometimes, and we don't want that. So to bed you go, my sweetheart."

"I'll sit quite still and rest while you and Mr. Parker talk—I promise, Harry," she begged. "Let me stay."

"No."

"Oh, very well!" she said with more spirit. "But I'm not going to be carried like a baby—put me down!"

"There you are—on your two capable little feet! Mr. Parker will see plenty of you in the future, so he'll excuse you this evening."

"I know—you want to talk over things with him, and I want you to," she said in her usual resolute way. "I'll go and you two can talk," and she gave her hand to Parker. "Good-by, Mr. Parker—for a little while."

"You're my client again then, Mrs. Kelly," he said, patting her hand.

"More than that," she said earnestly. "You are my best friend in the world, Mr. Parker—and Harry's."

"Thank you—that's a post of honor," he answered pleasantly. "I'll not forget." And he watched her until the curtains fell to behind her. She looked very young, very tired, yet there was about her the same grave radiance that had arrested Parker's attention that morning; Parker was wondering what she had whispered in Driscoll's ear, and of the young fellow's enigmatic answer: "Men die and men are born—I think women are our bravest soldiers."

"Let us sit down and smoke," Holt said. "I'm tired and I have no doubt you are. Nixie told me about last night—you couldn't have slept much. . . . She regularly broke down this morning, Mr. Parker—she cried for an hour after returning from your apartment. Murray had brought her in from Moreton House at midnight, together with that telling bit of evidence against Doctor Levene and the count, and she had only about an hour with me and then

I was called out by the Secret Service people. I had barely got out of the house before Burke called her up about Driscoll and she started for your place. Then to-day I had to go off on those Red Cross speeches. . . . Poor Nixie, it's been five terrible days for her, and only a few hours of joy. I have felt a selfish brute in having persuaded her to marry me, and yet I know that she is happier with me than she would have been without me, for it was the real thing with both of us, from the very beginning. . . . What I'm worrying over is the future."

"What do you think Mrs. Moreton is going to do?" Parker asked.

"Nothing. . . . They arrested Doctor Levene early this morning, and then two of the Secret Service called on Mrs. Moreton. What they told her and their general attitude settled that difficulty. She was amazed and horrified and terrified over the help she had given those two. She begged that her name shouldn't be brought into the matter. She promised not to contest the will—she was ready to promise anything—she even begged to be allowed to see Nixie and talk to her, but I wouldn't have that—not just now. Mrs. Moreton's sister is looking after Mrs. Moreton and her affairs, and Nixie is going to stay quietly here until Mrs. Moreton leaves Moreton House."

"But this whole thing will have to be made public," Parker said. "Those two will be tried."

Holt hesitated. He looked at the curtains through

which Nixie had disappeared, then rose and went to them, parted them and looked into the next room. When he came back to Parker, he said in a low voice, "I don't want Nixie to hear. . . . Something has happened, Mr. Parker, and Driscoll and I agreed that she ought not to be told to-night—it would be a shock to her. . . . Doctor Levene will not trouble this world any longer—he has done for himself."

"He has! He had the courage for it? . . . But he was alive enough at eight o'clock this evening, for he telephoned to my apartment. That's something I've puzzled over. Nixie said he had been arrested this morning, but he telephoned twice to-day, to my apartment? Did some one use his name?"

"No, he telephoned. . . . They were certain enough of him, Mr. Parker, and all day they have been using him. They have located several others of his kind through him. . . . They have their theory now, about his conduct last night, and those two telephone calls to your apartment. They think that his meeting with Driscoll in the subway last night was really accidental, that he was hanging about the subway trying to collect courage to end things. They thought at the time that he was watching for somebody and they wanted to discover who it was. What he gathered from Driscoll must have heartened him for the time being; a scapegoat was going to materialize. But when they arrested him he knew he was done for. When he telephoned to your house the first time, he was down-

town, just where I don't know, but in a room which was a fearful distance from the street. They had been questioning for hours; finally he asked if he might telephone to your apartment. They let him do it, and he asked for Driscoll—he wouldn't tell them why he wanted Driscoll. Then they took him to his own office, where he turned over some papers they wanted. Again he asked if he might telephone to you, and again they gave him permission, and that time he accomplished what he was after. . . . *His desk was near the window, Mr. Parker, and he was twenty stories up.*"

There was silence for a moment, then Parker lit his cigar, which had gone out. "A fortunate occurrence," he said briefly.

"So Driscoll and I think. . . . He couldn't have enjoyed that leap into space."

"And the count?" Parker inquired.

"He can't be moved—he's too ill."

"Mortally?"

"Acute peritonitis. . . . *He* is the real spy stuff—not a word from *him*. They know how to make their exits, those German agents. . . . The mistake the count made was in tacking his regular business to a private venture. I guess the German agent is in the same boat as the kaiser—they're on the rocks and it's each man for himself now."

"You guess right, I think."

"I've wondered, too, how much of this is going to be unloaded on the public?"

"'The Workers in Secret' will decide that, I fancy, Holt. It's in good hands, and we'll let it stay there. . . . I've done some private criticizing, many of us have, but I'm convinced now that one of the wisest heads America has ever produced is guiding this complex nation. I'm with him."

"And I," Holt said.

And then he began to talk of other matters. He told Parker of his boyhood, of his unromantic hard-working youth and his experiences in the machine shops. And then, for half an hour, Parker listened spell-bound to "Private Hal Kelly's Story," a simple, clearly defined history bristling with heroisms to which the young fellow laid no claim; he had the modesty of the true soldier; he had fought to the best of his ability —that was all, and he meant to go on fighting. Parker liked the man.

When he began to speak of Nixie, he opened wide his heart and Parker knew it was a sterling sort that had captured Nixola Allen, humanly faulty and humanly appealing by reason of his faults, but clean withal and with a large capacity for tenderness. "She's been my one *love,*" he said deeply. "I wanted her worse than I ever wanted water when I was wounded. And there was only one way to get her and I took it. I felt I was taking her from another man who had no right to her, and who would bring trouble on her. And even when she was all mine, my joy was followed by torment—I'd have to leave her

and he would be near her. I'm sorry enough now for my jealousy and deceit and my stupid misjudgment of a big love, a good deal bigger love than mine was in the beginning. . . . It's not easy, is it, Parker, for men to understand such a love as Mr. Moreton had for Nixie? We view love from the standpoint of sex—invariably. I believe he'd have given her to me gladly, if certain enough that she loved me and that I was the right sort. Nixie believed it—she wasn't a bit afraid to go to him that night and confess what we had done. I was ready for a fight, but not she—she was perfectly serene. . . . There's no horror, of the many I've known, that struck at me like the sight of that hale, hearty man lying there, done for! All that is decent in me rose up, and I felt like the grudging thief I was. Nixie didn't know all the thoughts I'd had in me. I felt sure she'd hate me." Holt stirred restlessly. "God! Those hours before the inquest, before I learned that the Secret Service had a grip on things and Nixie was safe! I spent most of that Sunday sitting in the park, where I first met her. I suppose I would have done the same on Monday but for having come across a Red Cross booth where some one was speaking. I got up and spoke without a 'By your leave?' and then they kept me busy. It was a relief. . . . It was Murray who routed me out at midnight last night, at the hotel, and told me Nixie was here. We had an hour together, before I was called out by the Secret Service, and I tried to confess my sins to

her." He laughed unsteadily. "Women are queer angels, Parker! She closed my mouth and made me hook up that yellow gown! She had brought with her the ugly thing which would hang Levene, but she also brought along her yellow gown! . . . She's a fascinating complexity, that little wife of mine . . . and I can't take her with me—" He could not go on, he was hot and quivering.

"You're going soon?" Parker asked tonelessly.

"I'll have only ten days—two weeks at the outside —then to the Front again."

The stir of feeling beneath Parker's controlled exterior flashed into sudden expression. "I'll follow you!" he said. "I'm a drone here! Thank God, we older men are going to get our chance!" He rose abruptly and stood in the window, his back to Holt. "I've had an intolerable *ache* in me—lately—" he muttered.

Holt said nothing for a long moment. He rose and stood beside Parker, and they both looked into the darkness. Then Holt said gently, "I know, Parker—it's Nixie."

Parker had been pale; the rush of blood to his face turned him dark. He was speechless.

"Don't think of going," Holt said in the same soft tones. "She needs you. . . . Your place is here—there are hundreds of women situated as she is, in the worst kind of need of just such help as you can give. The Government don't want your kind to go—you're

too highly valuable to them, right here. It would be a sin to let men like you go. . . . And, Parker, you guessed what it was she told Driscoll?"

"Well, I wondered," Parker answered indistinctly.

"She hopes it's so. She wants it that way, for she said I might not come back—and—well, she wants it. Then there's all that money Moreton has left her and she's determined to use it as he directed, to push this war in every way possible, and when the war's over to help those who are stranded. Now who is there to help her in this work but you? Nobody. . . . Why, you're her one reliance! And you'll find dozens of others who'll want you! . . . That's your work, Parker—plain as day."

"I suppose so," Parker said more clearly.

Holt was silent for a moment, then he said resolutely, "I may seem to be saying an unnatural sort of thing, but I'm looking ahead. I'm going to the Front and may not come back. We'll launch offensive after offensive—until Prussianism goes under. I've had experience enough to know what that means. . . . I'm leaving Nixie in your care—if I'm killed, make her love you. . . . You see, Parker, I trust you, and I trust Nixie. I got rid of jealousy and that sort of thing when I stood over Mathew Moreton. . . . Your promise will take a burden off my mind, Parker."

They turned toward each other and clasped hands.

And then Parker went down to the street. . . .

Morning was not far off—he would watch for it as he had five days ago, but without the ache of emptiness and dissatisfaction—he had found his place in the great order of things. The sun would break over the eager city and the great harbor would glisten—a new day.

THE END